

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



December 2014

Vol. 119, No. 12

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Purpose of Work

As is Karma, so is the manifestation of the will. The men of mighty will the world has produced have all been tremendous workers—gigantic souls, with wills powerful enough to overturn worlds, wills they got by persistent work. Such a gigantic will as that of a Buddha or a Jesus could not be obtained in one life. The gigantic will which Buddha and Jesus threw over the world, whence did it come? Whence came this accumulation of power? All this is determined by Karma, work. No one can get anything unless he earns it. This is an eternal law. We may sometimes think it is not so, but in the long run we become convinced of it. A man may struggle all his life for riches; he may cheat thousands, but he finds at last that he did not deserve to become rich, and his life becomes a trouble and a nuisance to him. We may go on accumulating things for our physical enjoyment, but only what we earn is really ours. A fool may buy all the books in the world, and they will be in his library; but he will be able to read only those that he deserves to; and this deserving is produced by Karma. Our Karma determines what we deserve and what we can assimilate. We are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows



that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. You will say, 'What is the use of learning how to work?' But there is such a thing as frittering away our energies. You must remember that all work is simply to bring out the power of the mind which is already there, to wake up the soul. The power is inside every man, so is knowing; the different works are like blows to bring them out, to cause these giants to wake up. Man works with various motives. Some people want to get fame, and they work for fame. If a man works without any selfish motive in view, does he not gain anything? Yes, he gains the highest. Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not the patience to practise it. Love, truth, and unselfishness are not merely moral figures of speech, but they form our highest ideal, because in them lies such a manifestation of power.

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

One-Verse Wisdom

December 2014
Vol. 119, No. 12

Acharya Shankara

एकश्लोकी

किं ज्योतिस्तव भानुमानहनि मे रात्रौ प्रदीपादिकं
स्यादेवं रविदीपदर्शनविधौ किं ज्योतिराख्याहि मे ।
चक्षुस्तस्य निमीलनादिसमये किं धीर्धियो दर्शने
किं तत्राहमतो भवान्परमकं ज्योतिस्तदस्मि प्रभो ॥

*Kim jyotistava bhanumanahani me ratrau pradipadikam
Syadevam ravi-dipa-darshana-vidhau kim jyotir-akhyahi me
Chakshustasya nimilanadi-samaye kim dhirdhiyo darshane
Kim tatrahamato bhavanparamakam jyotistadasmi prabho.*

[The guru asked the disciple:] ‘What do you think provides light? [The disciple replied:] ‘In the day, the sun [provides light] and in the night, lamp and others [like the moon are there to provide light].’ [The guru asked:] ‘If that be so, tell me which light [is needed] to see the sun and the lamp.’ [The disciple replied:] ‘Eyes [are needed].’

[The guru asked:] ‘When they [the eyes] are closed [what light remains?].’ [The disciple replied:] ‘The intellect [remains].’ [The guru asked:] ‘[What light is needed to] see the intellect?’ [The disciple replied:] ‘Then [at the time of seeing the intellect] I [that is Atman, alone is capable]. Therefore, you are [of the nature of] that supreme Light [of Atman or Brahman] and O [my] master, I too am the supreme Light [of Atman or Brahman].’

THIS MONTH

EACH PERSONALITY IS UNIQUE and so are its ideas. Respect for the beliefs and convictions of a person comes automatically when one sees that a person has strong faith in one's beliefs. That helps one to resist opposition and go on undeterred in one's spiritual life. **Apologetic Believers** emphasizes the need to give up being apologetic about our religious affiliations.

Everyone has the right to be heard. Each voice is important and has a different tone and so it is imperative that we do not add noise to any speech. Creating an awareness about the marginalization of voices has been one of the fields of work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian literary theorist, philosopher, and University Professor at Columbia University, where she is a founding member of the school's Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. She draws our attention to the **Many Voices** she has heard in her life, in her acceptance speech for the Kyoto Prize in Art and Philosophy, delivered in 2012. She has edited the speech for *Prabuddha Bharata* and it is being published for the first time. Summarizing the path of her life and work, she emphasizes the need to avoid having a blanket universal model for all cultures and beliefs. Beginning and ending her paper with acknowledgements of gratitude she establishes how every voice has its place in the symphony of life.

Identity crises arise when one does not understand one's own faith. A faith tradition can be properly carried forward only by the development of a cogent theology. Subhasis Chattopadhyay, Assistant Professor of English, Ramananda

College, Bishnupur, and a Biblical Theology scholar, presents his **Reflections on Hindu Theology**. The author draws our attention to the problems facing Hinduism in the absence of a theology fit to answer contemporary challenges. He also discusses how to create a Hindu theology based on its own framework rather than aimlessly trying to imitate constructs from other religions.

In **India's Ethnicity in the Eyes of Swami Vivekananda**, Swami Sandarshananda, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, traces the anthropological roots of Indians from the utterances of Swami Vivekananda.

The aesthete in us prompts us to perceive beauty and the artistic in nature and inspires us to indulge in creative pursuits and we increase the amount of experience of admiring the aesthetics of different human and divine expressions. This interplay of *bhava* and *rasa* leads us to a **Harmony through the Fine Arts** as shown by Swami Madhurananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

It is difficult for us to forgive or forget. We may ask ourselves whether we should exercise these qualities in our lives. Swami Kritarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, analyses this conundrum in **Forgive and Forget—A Riddle**.

The nature of Brahman eludes us and in spite of the numerous pointers given in the scriptures and by persons of realization, contemplation on Brahman continues to be difficult. Alan Jacobs, President, Ramana Maharshi Foundation, United Kingdom, delves into the nature of Brahman in **The Meaning of Brahman Explored** by analysing the meaning of the term.

Apologetic Believers

BELIEF IS BLIND. It should be so. A doubting belief is no belief. To believe in something, one cannot have even an iota of doubt. The moment doubt enters the mind, it is no more belief. Similar is the case with god or religion. If I believe in the tenets of a religion, I should believe them completely and only then can I call myself an adherent of that religion, not before that. One cannot put on the tag of a believer of a particular religion and then proceed to rationally test its precepts. It takes courage to believe and put one's everything into what one believes. Weakness of mind deters such belief. Does all this mean that one has to be an idiot to believe? No, but the process of convincing oneself, of questioning should precede acceptance.

If we look at the lives of great prophets, great believers, we find that all of them had to undergo a phase of severe doubts and lack of conviction. They were stern sceptics and did not accept anything on hearsay. However, these very personalities metamorphosed into persons having an unshakable belief in their chosen ideal. Another thing is common in their lives: They did not parade their beliefs while they were still struggling with doubts. They did not call themselves believers while they had yet to arrive at a firm conviction. This is the problem at hand. It is natural that doubt precedes belief. But, it is highly hypocritical to call oneself a believer while fighting with doubt. As no human being does anything without a purpose, this tendency of people also has a purpose and that is mainly to take advantage of the label of the particular religion one poses to be a believer of.

Acting as a believer while one is in reality not one, causes serious damage both to the genuine believers and also to the genuine sceptics. There can be doubt or there can be belief but there never can be belief mixed with doubt, which is just doubt. As it takes courage to believe, so does it take courage to doubt. When one lacks that courage, one tends to wear the comfortable overcoat of belief while trembling inside with doubt. How does one identify an apologetic believer? These are people who have no qualms in visiting institutions of a particular belief system, but shy away from identifying themselves as an adherent of that system when that community faces some problem, though at the slightest possibility of some benefit, they rush to proclaim their allegiance to that faith.

One argument of the apologetic believers is that they do not want to identify with a particular tradition because they are embarrassed by the wrongdoings of some persons belonging to that faith tradition. It is akin to the proverbial saying of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. If you have a headache, cut off the head and the problem is solved! Any faith tradition becomes such after a long tradition of saints and mystics, people who have experiential wisdom and translate them into precepts for their followers to emulate. Wrongdoings are done due to wrong understanding. Should not a believer attempt to correct the understanding of the adherents of one's faith tradition rather than taking pride in ridiculing the very ground one stands on? The apologetic believers do not do that because it needs effort to get firmly established in the rationality of one's faith. It requires

deep study, prayer, contemplation, meditation, or surrender—at least one of these to get an unshakeable faith. That is a difficult path to tread, so the majority take to the easiest path: Have your religion but do not talk about it!

It becomes worse if the religion one adheres to is not politically or economically strong, that is, people practising that religion do not have the upper hand in society. Then the apologetic believers start aligning their beliefs with those of the majority, at least in public, if not in private too. If God is believed to have many forms in a particular religion and a person lives in a society where the majority practise a different religion, probably monotheistic, then this person starts to speak exactly like the followers of that monotheistic religion. The reason is simple: Food and security are much more important than God!

There are some apologetic believers, to whose face any one can utter expletives about their faith, and yet not elicit even a mild rebuke. The reason given is: 'Will my God be any lower because of this abuse?' For them the answer is: 'No, of course not. Your God will not become inferior, but you and your faith will.' It would have been an altogether different case if the believer did not get affected by the insult. That would have been the behaviour of a saint. However, almost always, such insult does bring suffering to the believer, and yet she or he has no word of protest. That is not saintliness; it is the sign of lack of faith and courage.

The number of religious 'seculars' is on a rise for many years now. Such 'secular' believers would silently take in any amount of attack on their beliefs on the grounds that religion is only a private affair. That definitely sounds nice but what to do when people jeopardize your existence by wrongly understanding you, and more importantly, their own religions? You bring some understanding to them, by whatever means. This simple exercise would give more strength to both religions.

People defend themselves when attacked. An attack on one's values, culture, and beliefs is an attack at a very basic level. It is surprising how often such attacks go undefended. The victims lack the conviction to defend themselves and mistakenly pride on being non-violent. That is not non-violence but ignorance and cowardice. Every person has a right to believe in God in her or his own way. Affirming one's beliefs or talking about it can by no stretch of the imagination be called fundamentalism, until such avowal strikes or injures others. So being a believer does not make one a fanatic.

Swami Vivekananda believed that every person in the world should have a separate religion. This implies that he wanted us to have an independent faith system, beliefs that would not buckle under onslaughts by others. For that to happen, we need a thorough understanding, or a firm resolve to thoroughly understand ourselves and our relation with God and the world. Then our faith will not be apologetic. Most of us do not doubt that we will see the sun the next morning though death is the only certain event in our lives and can have an appointment with us at any time. Then why are we reluctant to adhere to a belief system? That is because we are afraid of losing our freedom, our individuality. Unless we give ourselves completely to what we believe in, there can be no faith in reality. Sri Ramakrishna was tested by Swami Vivekananda before he surrendered to him. That was no ordinary testing nor was it mild. It was a rigorous checking of the precepts and actions of the master. Thus faith was born. Steel gets its strength from the furnace. All apologetic believers should remember that they are neither sceptics nor believers. They don't want to take sides or have definite opinions, and spend their lives uncertain about themselves and others. The question is: Do they really want to continue living like that?



Many Voices

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

WHO SPEAKS WHEN WE SPEAK? Whether we are scientists or artists, institutionally educated, or otherwise, all our history speaks through us. We ourselves can only chart a very small part of that history. Today I have given myself as my task such a charting so that I can acknowledge that in choosing to reward me with the Kyoto prize, you have in fact rewarded many others who have contributed to my making, more than I can tell.

Recently I have discovered that highly educated people in Africa use mother tongues that were not systematized by European missionaries in the nineteenth century, to communicate to others who share that mother tongue. Indeed, if you follow the track of these un-grammatized mother tongues, sometimes you can move down the East coast of Africa all the way to the South. There are probably many other such tracks that I don't know about. In fact, the idea of calling them 'endangered' sometimes does not recognize this extraordinary survival record. Also, calling them 'traditional' sometimes does not recognize their mobility and changefulness through the centuries. Indeed, thinking of them as confined only to very poor communities does not recognize the presence of all these 'modernized' persons who use the language voluntarily, and of course, also use it for electoral purposes. In other words, the languages exist in the modernity of democracy. I have learned to think of these languages as repositories of untracked histories. Thinking about this resource with African and other colleagues, I have been helped in my efforts today.

Therefore, when I think of my parents, I am also thinking of the histories behind them, concealed by the official lines which seemingly produced them. With this proviso, and the proviso that I will build my words on my understanding that the ethical is the unconditional call of all others and the democratic is a politics based on training in judgement, I begin.

My parents did not just bring us up to think of other people. By their own example, they made it part of what I will call our 'soul', something holding together our thinking, feeling, imagining, and even our disposition of the body.

My mother, Sivani Chakravorty, disappeared in the early morning when I was five years old, to the local railway station, to welcome and help rehabilitate the refugees coming into Calcutta because of the partition of India upon our independence from the British Empire in 1947. As I grew up, she drew me into the work she did to make destitute widows employable. She laboured mightily to work on the establishment of Sarada Math, a nunnery; so that women who wanted to lead spiritual lives could find a place to do so. These women, mostly intellectuals, did a great deal of good in their turn for an altogether large circle of 'other people'. My mother went on to establish the first working women's hostel in Calcutta, with such success that the state government asked for her secret. In doing this, she also recognized the capacities of a cousin who had suffered greatly from domestic violence and, because of internalized gendering and material circumstances been unable to resist, by

employing her as the superintendent. My mother restored many lives in this way. I should add that, in her seventies and eighties, when she became an American citizen, she decided to start in her new country, by working more than ten thousand hours as a volunteer for victims of post-traumatic stress disorder among the veterans of the war in Vietnam.

I have only been able to list some of the things that my mother did. I have not been able to record the everyday presence of the cheerful and good humoured person who was at the same time on the move toward unconditional ethics.

My father, Dr Pares Chandra Chakravorty, born a village boy, destroyed a brilliant career as the youngest civil surgeon created by the British government, by refusing to give false evidence at a rape trial. This was before my birth. By the time I knew him, he was the saintly doctor with an enormous charitable practice among low income families living all around us. He was the man who protected the Muslims from the neighbourhood during the religious riots brought on by the partition of India, even as his own Muslim students protected him from the other side. When I was eleven years old—he died when I was thirteen—he took me to the local post office and pointed at the long lines, and said, ‘Because you’re my daughter, and because you’re a gentlewoman, they will let you go to the head of the line. Remember, always stand at the end of the line.’ This was in 1953. It is not an exaggeration to say that I have thought of this every day since the choice of pushing ahead became a possibility.

My parents made me sensitive of the difference of gender. My mother was fourteen when she was married. She was in her last year of high school. My father did not just believe that women should be educated. Of course he believed that. What is important was that he recognized that his child bride was an intellectual.

He kept the ways open for her so that she could go ahead and get a masters degree in 1937 when she was only twenty-four. And she continued as an independent intellectual until the very end of her life. As a woman receiving the Kyoto prize, I must say that the ethical turn in my mother and myself does not belong to the enforced responsibility toward others which is quite often the gender fix for women in all societies—not just traditional, I am thinking of ‘soccer moms’.

I think some of this was the result of my parents’ involvement with the early Ramakrishna Movement and its revolution in the institutional thinking of all sectarianism: of class, race, and religion, today largely forgotten because an in-depth training of children is no longer practised. Like the rest of the ‘rising’ world, we have lost the desire for preparing the muscles of the mind for ethical reflexes.

Ramakrishna (1836–1886) was an ecstatic visionary whose wife initiated my father into the ethical life in 1920, when he was twenty-one. To have a female spiritual teacher was undoubtedly of help in recognizing the importance of gender justice. In 1928, he took my mother for initiation into the ethical life to one of Ramakrishna’s direct disciples, Swami Shivananda. Shivananda’s simple down to earth gender sensitivity so inspired my sixteen-year-old mother that she told us the story many times. I hope you may discern its philosophical depth beneath its earthiness. The story still moves me to tears. I have a picture of this man in old age on my desk in my study. He said to my mother: ‘As a new bride in your husband’s house with your father-in-law in residence you will not have any time to yourself to meditate. When you’re alone to answer nature’s call, just clap your hands and say glory to the teacher, *jai guru*, and that will be enough.’ I will in a bit talk about gifts of spirit that I received from another monk in the movement in the 1960s.

My parents sent us to a school where the teachers were Christianized aboriginals and generally so-called lower-caste Hindus: St. John's Diocesan Girls' High School, attached to the oldest church in Calcutta, where Job Charnock, the founder of the city, lies buried. These teachers taught with the passion of the newly liberated. I do often say: Diocesan made me. Sanskrit, the classical language of North India, as grand as all classical languages are, was taught to me by Miss Nilima Pyne, one of these teachers, with such dedication that I can still use the language for my scholarly and teacherly work. As the days go by, Miss Charubala Dass, the principal of the school, becomes my role model. Her affectionate dignity and her gentle sternness is not something that I can hope to imitate. That she had a hand in putting in place the openness to the need for ethical reflexes that you have kindly recognized in me will be made clear by the following story, the significance of which at the moment I did not recognize.

I have been training teachers among the landless illiterate in western West Bengal for thirty years. I am myself not at all religious, not a believer, about which more later. Recently, in one of the meetings for all of the rural teachers come together for training, I gave them a lesson in English prepositions by repeating Miss Dass's school prayer: 'Be thou, O Lord, before us to lead us, behind us to restrain us, beneath us to sustain us, above us to draw us up, round about us to protect us.' The call of the ethical from my school days done into a different kind of lesson, which I translated, for these people rather far removed from the metropolitan center, in this case Calcutta. Make of it what you wish.

I should mention here that my parents loved our mother tongue and thus we were allowed to sustain some connection to what I call ethical semiosis. There is a language we learn first, as

infants, before reason, which activates the parts of our mind that are unavailable to the waking mind. As infants we invent a language. Our parents 'learn' this language. Because they speak a named language, the infant's language gets inserted into the named language with a history before the child's birth, which will continue after its death. As the child begins to navigate this language it is beginning to access the entire interior network of the language, all its possibility of articulations, for which the best metaphor that can be found is—especially in the age of computers—'memory'. Here, before our reason starts working, is the constitution of our ethical semiosis, or meaning-making, in the learning of our first language, in our first languaging. It is undoubtedly true that I am able to love English, French, and German, and now, in old age, Chinese and Japanese as a student, because the love of the mother tongue sustains this. I try, like all old-fashioned students of comparative literature, to produce a simulacrum of first language learning as I learn other languages, even as I know that it is of course, impossible.

In 1961, I came to New York, and, as a person connected to the Ramakrishna movement, I went to the Vedanta Society in New York. As you know, Vedanta is a highly cerebral philosophical area of Hinduism, and I encountered at the Vedanta Society in New York its extraordinary director Swami Pavitrananda, an austere yet gentle, immensely learned Vedantist in his sixties. In 1963, at the age of twenty-one, I felt that I had lost my faith—I can find no other words to describe this, and I am amused to think that I will have no guarantee that the Japanese equivalent will catch the absurdity of these words. I felt that it would be incorrect not to share this with the swami.

When I said to him, 'Sir, I have lost my faith,' he said to me, 'Gayatri, where will you escape?

Your focussed study is your way to the sacred, *tomar adhyayan-i tapasya*.' Let me say here that I understood Jacques Derrida's idea that reading is a species of 'prayer to be haunted' by the text as a consequence of Pavitrnananda's remark.

What I have translated as the 'way to the sacred' was the Sanskrit word *tapasya*. It is the word that describes the concentrated meditation of Siddhartha Gautama, from which he emerged as the enlightened one, the Buddha. I had understood the word, when the monk spoke, as an indication that the proper study of the humanities gave practice in the intuition of the transcendental, which prepared one to respond reflexively, if the call of the ethical happened to happen. In 1991, I received another gift of spirit which expanded this understanding into my soul.

In 1985, I had started a friendship with Bimal Krishna Matilal, the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford University. Bimal was interested in the philosophy of deconstruction and I was interested in reading indic rational critique in Sanskrit with him. This work continued until his death in 1991. In one of our last meetings, Bimal had spoken about one of the numerous etiologies to be found within Hindu heteropraxy. At his death, when I found myself in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale,

I looked up the story in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*: Brihaspati, the divine craftsman, created all the creatures, and they ran away from him. He ran after them but couldn't catch them. He returned sweating heavily, and dripped sweat into the fire where he had fashioned them. Hinduism lights a fire to establish divinity in its services. This dripping of sweat into the fire became the first offering and created the

human being, as well as the brick, looking forward to the dwelling that would move the human from nature to culture.

Standing there in the gathering dusk in Paris, I received this gift from my dead comrade, and from Charles Malamoud, with whom I had an appointment the next day—a French Jew who had written a stunning book on classical India—*Cuir le monde, Cooking the World*. I realized that *tapasya* was not just the enlightenment gained through the

transformation of intellectual labour. It related also to *taapa*, heat, the heat generated by creative manual labour in the living body. This realization inspired me in my attempt to teach the intuitions of democracy to the largest sector of the electorate in India.

Pavitrnananda gave me another direct gift in the practice of teaching. In 1964, at the Annual Convention of the Modern Language



Swami Pavitrnananda (1896–1977)

Association of America, I got my first full-time teaching job at the University of Iowa. I said to the monk, 'Sir, I am afraid. I am twenty-two. I am only three years out of India. I have to teach graduate students. I have inherited a graduate seminar on the French poet Baudelaire, the German poet Rilke, and the Irish poet Yeats. I am afraid.' 'Gayatri,' said he, 'you are going to teach for a living, for money. You are your students' servant. Have you not seen how the servant can chastise the master's children in order to perform her or his obligations? Always remember, you are your students' servant. If you start thinking you are a great teacher—a guru—all will be lost.' He was, of course, referring to a profession of domestic service that has now luckily disappeared almost completely, but the metaphorical lesson was not lost on me. I remind myself of it everyday, both at Columbia University and at the rural schools.

In 1967, by sheer chance, I ordered a book off a catalogue by a—to me—unknown author, and, little by little, my work began to encounter its philosophical shape. The book was *De la grammatologie*, the author Jacques Derrida.

In 1986, I emerged from the miasma of gender poison, two unsuccessful marriages. I found myself ready to learn from below. I looked around. I found the heroic medical activist Zafrullah Chowdhury, who sent me out with rural woman paramedics in Bangladesh. He set me to work at schooling the rural poor, sent me to work in remote night schools. The poet Farhad Mazhar, with whom I had formed a friendship in the seventies, introduced me to the practitioners at the devotional school of Lalan Shah Fakir, a nineteenth-century grassroots theologian and minstrel composer of amazing depth and invention. Farida Akhter, Farhad's comrade and partner, an indefatigable global feminist activist, drew me into that circuit. Under her leadership, I participated in the

1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, where the UN first opened its doors to NGOs or non-governmental organizations. In the North-South divided atmosphere of that meeting, I received a sense of how top-down planning could never be a shortcut to the ethical, how teaching the deprived nothing but justified self-interest was deeply problematical. For this, I continue to thank Farida.

Farhad has recently reminded me that I had counselled him to sink himself in Lalan. Yet I think of Lalan as his gift to me. Speaking to the disciples there at Lalan's graveside, I discover the wealth of deconstruction. And, because these friends are without institutional education, it is training again, in hanging out in another's space responsibly, basic training in responding to the ethical call if and when it comes, a training that a humanities education, understood in Pavitrananda's way, can perhaps attempt to provide.

Here is a description of their self-representation, shared at the death of one of their own:

He felt the necessity to mobilize the 'subalterns' and the 'outcasts' in order to create the ethico-political condition to unite the human kinds in their diversity. From this perspective he always insisted that anti-caste, anti-class, and anti-patriarchal politics is integral to the bhakti movement. Depoliticising the bhakti movement is to deny its profound ethico-political significance. If we leave his legacies unattended we will miss a solid ground to reconstitute the wisdom of Lalan's school. This mobilization means a congregation of wise people practising a harmonious and responsible lifestyle evolved through hundreds of years of tradition.

I should first point out that this movement brings together the two conflictual religious traditions of Eastern India: Islam and Hinduism, by integrating ethico-philosophical elements from both. Secondly, I should say a word about the 'subaltern', mentioned in the very first line.

‘Subaltern’ is a word that we have learned from Antonio Gramsci. On the analogy of the army where the ‘subaltern’ only takes orders, Gramsci used this word to describe those who are cut off from the state.

Finally a word about ‘bhakti’, which is described in the passage as requiring ‘anti-caste, anti-class, and anti-patriarchal politics’. Mine will not be an expert’s account.

Bhakti is a broad all-India movement. Lalan Shah falls within the branch in East India that took shape in the sixteenth century. The word ‘bhakti’ comes from the Sanskrit root *bhaj*, the primary meaning of which is ‘to divide’ as well as ‘to share’. This characteristic is shared by the French word *partager*. Deconstructive philosophers have commented a good deal on this characteristic of *partager*: divide but also share.

Would it surprise you if I revealed that I am discovering this French-Sanskrit connection to be ‘correct’ only because I am writing something for you, for an audience toward which I must be intellectually responsible? I knew of course that *bhaj* meant ‘to divide’, and had based my understanding of bhakti on it. Writing this piece, however, I looked in the Sanskrit-English dictionary, and saw that the *first* meaning of *bhaj* is given as ‘to divide’. Since on the model of the sixteenth-century European Reformation, the bhakti movement is generally explained as direct devotion, I thought until thirty minutes before writing these words that I alone thought that bhakti meant dividing oneself and playing a specific role laid out in the tradition, in as powerful a way as a great actor would, just not for money, and never giving up, in order to enter into a specific relationship into what the daily self cannot contain. This is what had been welcome to the disciples of Lalan Shah, because they knew it without the dictionary and without academic or popular

explanations. I could enter into this as a humanities person, through the importance of theatre. This was the deconstructive wealth I described above. And now you have made that wealth secure.

I have perhaps become a little abstract here. Let me go back to childhood.

When I was a child, I loved to ‘teach’ illiterate children who were domestic servants, dragging them into the kind of compulsory studentship that only a child can absolutely require. This early habit has never quite left me. As a result of this kind of attempt at un-coercive teaching on the ground whenever I visited Purulia, a ‘backward’ district of my home state of West Bengal, an activist from there sent me a plan, asking me to open an elementary school for tribal children. I responded with hesitation, but once it got going, I could not tear myself away from it. I did not know it then, but the work of Antonio Gramsci, a man who had been put in jail by Mussolini and who died in jail at the age of forty-seven, was going to resonate with this teaching work—because I was interested in learning the environment of these tribals, who voted in the world’s largest democracy without much sense of the intuition of democracy at all. I didn’t know then, but this would become for me a project that I came to call supplementing vanguardism, a project that would come to recognize that Gramsci in jail working out that Marx’s project of social justice was an epistemological one—in other words, a matter of changing how one constructed objects of knowledge—was on the same journey. My thinking of social justice was started at the age of fifteen, connected with the work of Karl Marx, but this gave it a kind of ethical specificity which was important. Democracy was, after all, the difficult politics of the ethical. This work would also come to reveal to me that my

interest in the African-American educationist W E B Du Bois would also come to resonate with some of the assumptions—that the very poor should themselves be ethical subjects rather than simply the recipients of alms—that sprang from this period.

From the start, I started shedding presuppositions at these schools. I came to realize that these people had been cognitively damaged by the oppression inherent in the caste system. This is where my understanding of *tapasya* as both intellectual and manual enlightenment came into play. The idea of manual labour was of great interest to my teachers and students in the rural area, especially when I pointed out that they had been denied the right to intellectual labour, which only the upper classes and castes were supposed to be able to perform. Thus even manual labour to them was without joy. They were able instantly to recognize and understand this theme. As the days went by, and the US went by, I was beginning to recognize that at the high-end, American students were also denied the right to intellectual labour because of the facility of the Internet search engines and because of the total focus on employability and revenue. I am certainly not a technophobe. But I believe the digital is both poison and medicine, and can be used productively, in a healing and constructive way, only by minds trained at the slow speed of the humanities.

In 1997, my dearest friend, Lore Metzger, died. Dying, she gave me a gift of spirit. The last time I saw her, we stayed up all night talking. I asked her what still seemed valuable. Lit with the glow of triumph over great pain in the proximity of death, she said, without hesitation, 'teaching'. I had spoken to her of the teaching in the rural schools, in long monologues, in her study in Atlanta. She never interrupted me. I was therefore overwhelmed but not surprised

that she also left me a material gift—\$10,000—so that I could start a foundation in the name of my parents: the Pares Chandra and Sivani Chakravorty Memorial Foundation for Rural Education. Your bounty has augmented the foundation greatly. I hope I will be able to train one or two workers in the lessons I have been trying to learn from my experience, trying to teach with the same standard of quality control at both ends of the spectrum.

Here a gift of spirit from my sister Professor Maitreyi Chandra must be acknowledged. You have been kind enough to invite her, but it is no discourtesy to you to say that she would have come at her own expense. She has been and is active at the highest levels of work to influence education, especially technical education for the girl child, with the Government of India. Her work influences a very large number of people, while my work can only remain focussed on a few hundred. She knows how much her experienced encouragement, that my kind of textural work is necessary to sustain the structural work undertaken by the state, has meant to me over the years.

Let us speak of the material implications of the training for the ethical. Before I die, I want to understand something—understanding everything is impossible—about bypassing the necessity of 'good' rich people solving the world's problems. 'Good' rich people are dependent on bad people for the money they use to do this. And the 'good' rich people's money mostly goes back to bad rich people. Beggars receive material goods to some degree and remain beggars. My work is to produce problem-solvers rather than solve problems. In order to do so, I continue to teach teachers, current and future, with devotion and concentration, at the schools that produce the 'good' rich people—Columbia University—and the beggars—seven

unnamed elementary schools in rural Birbhum, a district in West Bengal; this work cannot be done with an interpreter and India is multi-lingual; Bengali is my mother-tongue. I must understand their desires, not their needs, and, with understanding and love, try to shift them. That is education in the humanities.

My task, then, is to learn from mistakes how to teach the practice of the intuitions of democracy—the tug of war between autonomy and the rights of others. For the top, the auto-critical habit in the intellectual produced by the presence of basic civil liberties: the freedom of speech; democracy constraining freedom of speech through constructive auto-critique. For the bottom, the hope that perhaps even one student will develop something like democratic judgement, quite different from justified self-interest against oppression from all sides, and from mere leadership.

Let me unpack these words.

Learning from mistakes. The major mistake is to think that equality means sameness. My upbringing, by enlightened parents in the metropolitan middle class, and all the caring gifts of spirit that I have here recounted, resulted in a collection of pre-suppositions and habits that is our instrument of learning. That instrument of learning cannot be identical with that of people who had been millennially repressed, specifically in how they were permitted to use their minds.

I want to give a concrete example here.

I met Chris Rewa, a young Belgian woman, at a biodiversity festival in Bangladesh in 2000. We sat on the stoop of a thatched cottage with wattle walls. I was listening to a stream of complaints from rural women about what the requirements of micro-credit aid really represented for them. Sitting there in the delicious winter sun, Chris said to me that she was disillusioned with working at her city job in Belgium, a multinational

NGO, perhaps? What she said next was, I now know, the beginning of her journey, just as, a few years before that, it had been mine; coming to the realization that equality is not sameness. ‘Gayatri’, she said to me then, ‘I wanted to give up that restrictive job and be with the world’s poor. But I had thought that these people would be just like Belgians, but poor. And now.’

How do I know this was the beginning of a journey for her?

On 14 September 2012, I arranged a high-profile meeting at Columbia University to create public awareness of the tremendous oppression of the minority Muslim Rohingyas in Burma—also known as Myanmar—even as the country is supposedly going through a democratic transition. One of the most respected names to emerge was Chris Rewa’s.

Just as the world’s poor are not Belgians, so are the landless illiterate in Birbhum district not metropolitan Calcuttans, only landless and illiterate. It took me some years to realize that I had to begin to learn the specificity of the mental instrument with which they know. And if I am to teach them I must learn to serve them to use this instrument, not some universal human instrument. I am still learning and failing, learning and failing, not giving up.

And yet they vote; and that, if not universal, is generalizable. I am a citizen of India, and in the one-person one-vote situation, I am their equal but not the same. Therefore, I am not just training and teaching teachers and children who are by nature not good enough—the upper class view—but by history made less than good. I am also trying to provide the habits of democratic thinking so that they vote right. These subaltern classes cannot use the state. In a democracy, the people supposedly control the state. My humble, unsuccessful, and persistent effort can be called restoring the spirit of citizenship to the

subaltern. I think of my mother serving the Vietnam veterans as a new US citizen.

Citizenship, however, is generally understood as the self-interested part of democracy: autonomy. Without an other-interested ethical education this preparation is unprotected from the worldwide control exercised today by trade in the difference in the different currencies of different countries, rich and poor: finance capital.

We must understand the other-interested side of democracy for the subaltern as well.


Drawing from my own Indian experience, I had earlier found the best model for democracy in Indian classical music: creative freedom within self-chosen structural rules. Drawing from his European experience, my colleague Jan Elster found the best model of the mindset that will get to democracy in Homer's story of Odysseus having his sailors wax their own ears and bind him to the mast so that he could hear the sirens' magic song and still not give in to the temptation of sailing to their island and wrecking his ship.

Both of us were thinking at the top. To create classical music, you must be highly trained. And Odysseus needed the sailors to do his bidding. Democracy as self-restraint: This is what I describe above as democracy constraining freedom of speech through constructive auto-critique. But what about those who have been, by gender and class, forcibly constrained? Develop something like democratic judgement, formula for the bottom.

The practical development of democratic judgement in the rural child is to distinguish between education and passing exams. Meghnad Shabar of Bangthupi settlement taught me this in 2006. The Human Development Index can only ask for quantity: how many years of schooling. For our children we tour schools, where is

the best? Meghnad, tribal teenager, child of illiterate landless parents, had not wanted to be a statistic for the local landowner, as the first tribal child to come first in the State secondary exam. He had wanted to be educated according to unconditional standards. Democracy in the subaltern is a fearful thing. The landowner closed the schools. Twenty years' labour gone. Try again, I told myself; Birbhum district is less feudal than Purulia.

Among these subaltern children, then, the polarization between top and bottom comes undone. Children's minds are like wet cement. We are inscribing contradictory habits into them. No competition, yet unconditional pursuit of excellence. Pleasure in schoolwork, yet training to enter the mainstream. Discourage tendency to leadership, yet encourage questioning authority. Nothing through sermons, everything through classroom moves. Gender balance, gender preference. Easy to say, tremendously difficult to devise as habit-formation, not blind obedience, in child-subjects and teacher-subjects that are equal but not the same.

The recently dead poet Adrienne Rich can describe my response to the Kyoto Prize, as the necessary effort to 'call ... up the voices we need to hear within ourselves'¹. I call them up, give them names, and accept the prize in all their names, except the ones too well-known to include: Sivani Chakravorty, Pares Chandra Chakravorty, Nilima Pyne, Charubala Dass, Swami Pavitranaanda, Farida Akhter, Farhad Mazhar, Prashanta Rakshit, Lore Metzger, Roshan Fakir, Maitreyi Chandra, Meghnad Shabar. On their behalf I thank you. 

Reference

1. Adrienne Rich, 'What Does a Woman Need to Know' in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1986), 10.

Reflections on Hindu Theology

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

SRI RAMAKRISHNA COMPARED our possible understanding of the supreme godhead in terms of blind men groping different parts of an elephant and concluding that their limited perceptions of the parts were indeed the whole elephant. Theology, which is the study or knowledge of the godhead, is akin to Sri Ramakrishna's portrayal of our efforts to think of God.

Defining Theology

Theologians, generally speaking, try to understand the workings of the supreme godhead within the times they are born into. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines theology as 'the study of religion and beliefs.' This is a very broad definition spilling over into many disciplines not considered theology. There have been different definitions of theology and it has been generally talked of in connection with Christianity, more than any other religion.

However, Hindus have also theologised throughout their histories. For example, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, saw various forms of attraction between dyads of people in the light of the supreme godhead: 'Verily, not for the sake of the husband ... is the husband loved, but he is loved for the sake of the self ... Verily not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are the sons loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self.'¹

This is theology at its best—in this Upanishad, even our attraction to wealth is described in terms of the supreme godhead or the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta. This explanation of

all conceivable areas of life through one's faith in God is the proper domain of the study of theology. Another way of defining theology is St. Anselm of Canterbury's classic proposition that '*fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding'² is theology. St. Anselm ties up theology with a particular *faith community*. Theologising is religion specific and concerns itself primarily with the religious traditions of the faith community that the theologian aligns with. Moreover, theology is done with reference to a faith tradition; generally the sacred scriptures of a faith community. Pope Pius XII had explained the works of theologians thus:

It is also true that theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living Teaching Authority is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they can really never be exhausted. Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh; on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile, as we know from experience.³

This article is part of an ongoing discussion on 'self-reflective Hinduism'. Sister Nivedita says in her introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*: 'For the first time in history ... Hinduism itself forms here the subject of generalization of a Hindu mind of the highest order. For ages to come the Hindu man who would verify, the Hindu mother who would

teach her children, what was the faith of their ancestors will turn to the pages of these books for assurance and light.⁴

This is what is meant in this article by ‘theologising’: not writing sectarian commentaries on scriptures, but reflecting on Hinduism itself. And not just philosophizing, either. For instance, it is one thing to explain philosophically the concept of the incarnation of God. It is another to ‘theologise’ about Sri Ramakrishna or other incarnations. To make the distinction clearer, to philosophize about the incarnation is to show conceptually in philosophically objective terms what incarnation means, and to argue for or against its possibility.

To theologise about Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation is to start from the standpoint of faith—accepting that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation, as millions of people have already done—and to explore the implications. It means in part to speak to the faith community. It also means to make Hinduism self-aware by conceptualising it for the faith-community, as Swami Vivekananda did, which is pointed out by Sister Nivedita above; and that includes looking at Hinduism as a whole, not from a sectarian vantage point. And it also means, making the Hindu community self-aware so that it can defend itself in the community of religions. This article could be seen as the beginning of a discussion, with points to agree with and points to disagree with: that is what makes it a discussion.

Theology and Religion

Since theology is religion specific, it would be proper to inquire into the meaning of religion to comprehend the nature of theology as an academic domain. Religion has many meanings, depending on which the meaning of theology fluctuates:

‘Religion’ and ‘theology’ are not terms with fixed meanings and invariant applications. They are rather topics or commonplaces—not in the sense of the familiar and the trite, but in the classical sense of linguistic variables, terms ambiguous and capacious enough to house a vast diversity of meanings, arguments, and referents. The interconnection of such topics constitutes neither a determined problem nor an exact proposition.⁵

Thus, doing theology without defining what is meant by religion is impossible. Religion, as has been pointed out by Buckley above, signals so many different things to so many branches of learning that we would want to give up the project of naming qua defining altogether. For instance, Sigmund Freud defined religion in terms of totems and taboos, of compulsive repetition of rituals,⁶ through what we today know as psychoses. On the other hand, for Karl Rahner, religion will mean nothing without the reality of God:

In the last resort all it can settle with respect to religion remains enclosed within the brackets of God’s free sovereignty and the knowledge of this sovereignty, at the disposal of which man must put himself by obedience in true *religio*, and in which God either denies himself to man or bestows himself in free grace. And on this either-or rests the final decision as to the concrete shape taken by a truly and existentially significant religion.⁷

The contemporary meaning of theology depends on our understanding of what religion is: religions can be, on the one extreme, atheistic, being only a meta-narrative constructed by us or, it can be seen as coming into being through divine providence. Both these views about religion are Continental and it may be more useful to define religion more moderately—it is simultaneously invested with transcendence, while being always worked on by human agency.

Theological Traditions

The point of the above discussion is that theology is dependent on our understanding of what religion is or is not. Yet the etymology of 'theology' is deceptive and gestures towards a possibility for understanding God. This is impossible since God qua Brahman is beyond the grasp of the intellect; beyond the trappings of the *gunas*. Thus theology concerns itself with the consequences of the workings of the *nirguna* Brahman within the woof of history.

Keeping in mind the multiplicity of theologies, we can for the purpose of this essay define theology as the effect of the *praxis* of being aware of the transcendence of life in the here and the now. It is accepted within both Judaism and Christianity that Yahweh acts within a linear history, punctuated with the fall of man, the resurrection of the Messiah, and the imminent second coming of Christ, parousia. The expression and explication of this chronicity is the subject matter of the academic study of Christian theology.

An example will clarify this: Oscar Romero, an Archbishop at El Salvador, who called on Salvadoran soldiers to stop violating human rights, was gunned down for his pacifist stand; Jesuits at their university campus in El Salvador too were killed. The Peruvian Roman Catholic priest Gustavo Gutiérrez and later the Jesuit priest, Jon Sobrino who worked in El Salvador reacted to the poverty and violence in Latin America and begun doing a new kind of theology. Before them, Christian theology had often been speculative and philosophical. Gutiérrez⁸ and Sobrino⁹ reinterpreted the *Gospels* in the light of the lived realities of their environments. Their new theologising came to be known as 'liberation theology'.

Christian theology thus veered away from meditating on God to the more mundane, yet more urgent need for uplifting the living conditions of the people of Latin America and then, of

the entire world. It is important to note that now there is no mention of a particular religion—the Catholic theologian Sobrino now is concerned not merely with the Roman Catholic faith tradition he had inherited; but with all peoples of the world.¹⁰ But he tries to solve various crises plaguing us through the hermeneutics of Christology. Since he is a Catholic priest, he theologises from the context of being a Spanish, white Christian, placed by Yahweh in El Salvador. It is in this sense of being missioned to heal the world that we can call the economist Bernard Lonergan SJ, a theologian—albeit a theologian focussed on Christ's role in the global movement of capital.

Theology therefore arises out of the contingencies of both time and space. Theology is culture, geography, and time specific. Hindus have been doing a certain kind of theology for centuries before Thomas of Aquinas wrote his *Summa*. For example, Advaita Vedanta has meditated on the cause, nature, and the verity of the *being in time*. Hindu acharyas have systematically studied the nature of the godhead or Brahman and the relationship between the jiva and Brahman. Therefore, Hindus along with the Christians, the Buddhists, and atheists have practised systematic theology.

Countering Doubt

The need for theology within Hinduism is to create a bulwark for those who are faith pilgrims. It is not for those whose careers depend on exploiting the doubts and insecurities of the devotees. Otherwise those who do not belong to the faith community of the Hindus will through knee-jerk reactions reject the very idea of Hinduism and a united India as facetious and hegemonic. They will label any talk of God, nation, and ethics as being right-wing and conservative. It is not proper to decry them from within the hermeneutic of Hindu theology since from the

Hindu faith community's perspective, these people do not have the intellectual rigour to rise above philosophy and have lost sight of the goal of human life—Self-realization. Therefore, it is wrong on the part of the Hindu faith-community to respond meaningfully to them.

Thus we find that historiography for the history of Hindus by people outside of the Hindu faith community, though called scientific, is entirely based on materialist dialectics. They do not see God or any other transcendental force informing their hermeneutic. As it is a matter of faith it is imperative for Hindu theologians to see historical events as being entirely willed by the Brahman with qualities, a concept first thought of in Hinduism.

A simple illustration will suffice: why is it that a certain kind of Hindu historiography needs to be done as against Western modes of historicising? We need to see the huge corpus of literature on India's partition. They definitively locate the event of the partition within the paradigms of colonialism and the British Raj. While this specificity is logically valid being structuralist in nature; this whole schema discounts the partition as an event within the continuum of the Hindu understanding of history. Hindu historiography sees history as definitively circular, infinitely repeatable, and more Nietzschean than it is acknowledged. The quasi-historical event of the partition did not merely rise out of social, economic, political, and normatively religious factors. It was also transcendental and metaphysical; it was God's will.

Another clichéd field is psychoanalysis: do we divide the mind as Freud did or do Hindus treat the neurotic individual in terms of Hindu theories of psychology? While Freud posits the unconscious; Hindu metaphysicians of the mind insist on the blissful Atman behind each of us. These two very separate issues have important

practical ramifications: the destiny of India and the sanity of mentally disturbed Indians.

Hinduism conflates the idea of religion with that of the goals of human life and stresses the value of human prowess. Therefore, for Hindus, religion signifies the totality of being human in relation to their revealed scriptures and God. Hindu cosmology is based on the One becoming the many—everything, every possible action is from within dharma and inseparable from dharma. And Hindu dharma is the way of the Brahman qua the Godhead. This is in contrast to say, Buddhism, which does not see religion in terms of God: 'The Buddha ... [refuses] to admit any metaphysical principle as a common thread holding the moments of encountered phenomena together, rejects the Upanisadic notion of an immutable substance or principle underlying the world and the person and producing phenomena out of its inherent power, be it "being", atman, brahman or "god"'.¹¹

A Hindu Theology for Our Times

Now, we need to turn to liberation theology to underscore the need for doing theology in India, amongst Hindus. A religion can remain alive and not be mythical if its adherents adapt to the signs of the times. Thus, the Roman Catholic curia rejected Latin for English in its liturgy during the Second Vatican Council. Today scholars within the Roman Catholic tradition theologise not by first studying Old and New Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Roman Catholic theologians depend on acceptable translations of original or source texts. For example, without Benedicta Ward's translations of the sayings of the Desert Fathers,¹² one cannot do Christian desert theology.

There are scholars who have to be experts in ancient languages like Sumerian to first translate the primary Judaeo-Christian texts. Further, Christian desert-theology speaks to us because

of its praxis by Charles de Foucauld in our times. In this world of social networking leading to constant connectivity with hundreds of friends, the practising Roman Catholic will find means to keep one's life in order through desert spirituality and theology. Thus in a sense the work of the Christian theologian is to keep alive the message of Jesus by helping each generation of Christians to understand the Gospels within their times and locales.

Hindus have long meditated on the nature of Brahman, the Atman, and causality. They have constructed moral theologies which enforce categorical imperatives. But the urgent work which needs to be done is to start theologising for the twenty-first century. The demands of this century are unique and there is a need to have theologians who can help us in realizing the god-experience in *the here and the now*. Hindu theology has to be bipartite—there is a need for experts to address the faith community of those who accept the Sanatana Dharma and then, there is a need for others who will theologise in a more global and plural manner.

Jacques Dupuis in his magnum opus, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* has this to say of our ideas of that reality which can be only normatively identified but never really entrapped by language or even religions:

One of the main objections raised against the theocentric paradigm was its uncritical assumption of a concept of the Absolute Reality akin to the monotheistic and prophetic religions of the Western Hemisphere, one totally alien to the mystical traditions of the East. How could a preconceived idea of God be imposed upon all in a bid to show how in their differences they do converge in the same Divine Center? This situation forced the protagonists of theocentric pluralism to propose further models which, however, amount to little more than new variations on the same theme ... Sharing as they

do in this universal search, all religious traditions have, in their differences, equal value; none has precedence over the others or is privileged with a special divine revelation ... The notion of 'myth'... must also be applied to the idea of the Divine Ultimate, whichever be the form under which it comes to be known in the different religions: the Hindu Brahman, the Allah of Islam, the Yahweh of Judaism, the *Abba* of Christianity ... To speak of 'Our Father in heaven' is to refer in the Christian mythical key to that which is 'the Real'.¹³

Dupuis sets the tone of respect that doing theology demands of the contemporary theologian. Instead of building and examining scholastic idols, Hindus need to begin with assuming that their ideas of the supreme Godhead are best understood by that which Dupuis calls 'The notion of "myth"' (ibid.). Since we perceive the supreme Godhead, the Brahman, only through a dark glass, we need to materialize the *notion of myth*. The transformation of Dupuis' *myth* demands making the intangible, tangible. When the mythical is constrained by time and space, it becomes a religion open to theological scrutiny.

Just as Acharya Shankara streamlined different modes of worship and organised different monastic orders, the present need is to develop a fresh and cogent system of theological doctrines that can be followed by devoted Hindus. Who is an avatara? What is grace? Who can be called a saint? Though such questions have been addressed time and again in Hindu religious texts, often such texts belonged to a particular sect within Hinduism, which may not be accepted by many other Hindu sects. The present need is to have a system to answer these questions from an overall perspective, giving broad outlines accommodating the variety and catholicity of Hinduism, which would be acceptable by all sects and traditions within Hinduism. This would help lay devotees identify and affirm the true practitioners and saints of the faith.

The very idea of a 'Hindu Theology' could be a jarring note to many. However, the word 'theology' is used here for want of a better word and does not mean the adopting of any framework outside of Hinduism. In due course, this discipline could be accommodated under the wide ambit of 'Adhyatmika Shastra'.

In this context, 'Hindu Theology' would mean the systematization of various beliefs within the Hindu tradition, from the perspective of a believer of the Hindu faith that will affirm and defend the Hindu religious tradition. This would be in effect a reconceptualising of Hindu theology received from the tradition of scriptures and would help the average Hindu better understand one's faith and also the other religions, defend or justify the faith, and help in applying the resources of Hindu tradition to present-day needs. This need becomes accentuated now when believers of major world religions that have established theological systems also feel that the theological doctrines and the practice of their faiths have become disconnected.

Hindus need to have a clear understanding of their theology for their own sake and not to position others as 'anonymous' adherents of their faith, that is, not to claim non-Hindus as 'actually being Hindus without knowing it'. The concept of the 'anonymous Christian' is now clichéd in Christian circles. The term was put forward by Karl Rahner SJ, arguably the best twentieth-century Catholic theologian. He mistakenly thought of labelling all non-Catholics as Catholics; the non-Catholics just did not know that they were in fact all Roman Catholics. Hindu theologising will enable Hindus to respond to such marginalization effected through Christian theology. The necessity of such a response will be evident from what Rahner writes, 'the "anonymous Christian" in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian

mission, who lives in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope, and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is oriented in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.'¹⁴ It is notable that Rahner called non-Christians 'pagans'—a derogatory term—when the structuralists within the social sciences were making revolutionary critiques of Christianity.

Conservative Hindus may object to theologising as a cultural work because it would mean relying too heavily on Western hermeneutics and paradigms. Nevertheless Hinduism needs to reconceptualise its indigenous theological system based on its scriptures but not limited to glossing. It is an existential need—the Catholic theologians mentioned above started vigorous theologising when their own faith was in jeopardy. A religion which cannot adapt itself to reality is doomed to extinction. Therefore, it may be prudent to begin a concerted effort to reconceptualise theology within Indian and Hindu paradigms.

So, what could be the context of doing theology in India for Hindus? India is not yet poverty-free, most Indians neither understand Sanskrit, nor do they speak English. Thus, they are at risk from religio-cultural amnesia and at the same time, through lack of English language proficiency, they miss out on technologically informed paradigm changes. With each technological paradigm shift, huge numbers of Indian Hindus are pushed further back economically and culturally.

For instance, many Indians in present-day businesses throughout the country speak fake Americanese and have no conception of the Sanatana Dharma. Thus they feel dislocated and often, inferior to persons with more secure jobs, and at the same time, inferior to the Americans with whom they have to interact. Often American clients make fun of Indian accents. This phenomenon was non-existent even two

decades ago. It will not do to thrust a copy of Bhagavadgita to those in need; neither will hatha yoga cure them of their systematic exploitation by huge corporations.

Present-day Challenges of Hindu Theology

Economic Challenges • The need of the hour is that Hindu theologians frame economic policies which redress the skewed wealth distribution patterns and further, have in place an educational apparatus which equips a Hindu to harness the tectonic shifts happening as a result of technological advancement. Unlike politically informed policies, Hindu theologians will have to base their recommendations based on the Hindu canon. Only if there are Hindu theologians addressing their culture specific social and moral ills, can the Hindu faith community appreciate the importance of Sanatana Dharma.

Social Challenges • Hindu social structure inculcates slavish obedience—a remnant of colonial rule—to caste injunctions, to our elders, and to our imagined regional linguistic communities. Theologians need to address these issues thereby making caste prejudices in marriages and other social observances, irrelevant. Hindu theologians have to be socially sensitive. Maybe there is a need to emphasize the importance of the individual over the collective since India needs entrepreneurs to revitalize the Indian economy. It will not do to merely sing the glories of India's or Hinduism's past.

Biological Challenges • Hindu dharma encompasses the totality of life: thus Hindu theologians need to take a hard look at issues like euthanasia, abortion in the case of congenital neo-natal diseases, and of course, at India's burgeoning population. Hindu theologians will now not have the luxury to contemplate the nature of *being*, of God, of even Hinduism itself—lest

such self-reflexivity gives way to mere intellectual gymnastics. They have to know genetics, carcinogenesis, and the relative merits and demerits of genetically engineered crops—otherwise India cannot feed her people. As Swami Vivekananda insisted, empty stomachs are not conducive either to national rejuvenation or for spiritual endeavours.

National Challenges • Hindu theologians have to address India's huge fiscal deficits leading to poverty. They have to deal with the onslaught of the Semitic religions and tricky conversions of marginalized Hindus to other religions. Swami Vivekananda too reacted to colonialism and the dismal state of India's economy under British rule. He also reacted against our seductions by foreign religions.

Educational Challenges • Hindu theologians have their work cut out for them—they have to get educational institutions up and running on a par or better than the best organizations around the world. Hinduism does not need mere pundits who can mouth by rote parts of the Hindu sacred scriptures. Hinduism needs a missiology of action. There is a need for theologians who can prepare, train, and support persons who will take the message of Sanatana Dharma to every part of the world. In short, Hinduism would do well to adapt to the signs of our times or Hinduism as a religion will become—like the religions of the Egyptians and the Greeks—merely mythical.

Thus there is a need for Hindu theologians who will create a hermeneutics of interpreting the actions of other faith communities in terms of Hindu metaphysics. For instance, what do the Hindu sacred scriptures have to say about the rise of extremism in the Semitic religions? Why cannot disputes based on religion be settled for good? Hindus as a faith community cannot settle for political answers, since politics is partisan. Hindus need to know why

God allows such disputes to endure. Once they understand Hindu theodicy, they will know how to react to global conflicts and to conflicts with neighbouring nations.

Maintaining the Faith Community

A systematic Hindu theological corpus is needed if we are to ensure that the Hindu faith community is helped in practical matters. For example, like every other faith community, Hindus also need family support systems like counselling. It is the laity who need the theology for it is from within this Hindu world view that will arise the community leaders of the future. Service in Sanatana Dharma is not akin to social work; it is a transcendental mission of living out faith in daily service. Thus the inner life is prioritized over social concerns. Hindu theology will enable this resituating of daily living.

We now need to turn to two concepts: Hinduism and Hindu theology. Hinduism has been rejected as not meaningful through etymological and cultural analyses. Disciplines such as Asian studies, South Asian studies, and Indian studies have been successful in popularising in academic circles the foreign origins of the term 'Hindu'. The scholars in these disciplines do not accept the existence of Sanatana Dharma, leave alone any idea of being Hindu. Again this whole project of systematising Hinduism runs the risk of being conflated and thus Othered, with the high-handedness of the political polemicists.

Naysayers miss the intellectual enterprise of Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida, and Martha Nussbaum. They are Jews writing on or glossing the Torah, and thus what they pass off as modernism or cosmopolitanism comes from their own rootedness in Judaism. They are speaking of accepting the 'gentile' who is anathema to kosher Jews. Thus what they understand by secularism is not what Hindus mistake as

secularism. Hindu intellectuals have paved the way for moral relativism. A renewed approach to Hindu theologising will correct the tendency of many scholars, within both Indian studies and Hindu studies, to reduce Sanatana Dharma to structuralist critiques devoid of either lived experiences of being Indian and Hindu or failing to understand the value of Hindu rituals. The latter are scrutinized through mainly European Enlightenment hermeneutics. The irony is that the European Enlightenment was derisive of Indians for being colonial subjects.

Training of a Hindu Theologian: A Possible Path

Now the time is ripe for training persons to become Hindu theologians in *the here and the now*. The first condition to be met while theologising within the Hindu religious traditions is to have Indologists translate two types of source texts: the Sanskrit corpus and the vernacular, including dialectical, texts into English. There is no bypassing the English language. Further, these prospective theologians will have to be experts in various disciplines. Only then can these persons of faith access fruitfully Hinduism's huge religious corpora and reinterpret them according to the needs of present times.

The first requisite to do Hindu theology will now be presented at the end. Only those who through the grace of God, believe and live out the realities of the Sanatana Dharma can become Hindu theologians. Without *shraddha*, there cannot be Hindu theologians. Karl Rahner SJ, Bernard Lonergan SJ, Thomas of Aquinas OP—the doyen of all Christian theologians, were all first men of deep faith and then from their God-experience they began to lay out their systematic theologies regarding their Catholic faith, the social conditions prevailing during their own times, and the life-world.

Hindu theologians should be first trained in the crucible of their own families who practise the truths of Hinduism. Then arises the need for social and economic support. Finally, Hindu monks and ascetics should teach these novice theologians what it means to realize God in the present moment. It is with this training that a young person will begin to look at the world with eyes tempered with Hinduism's doctrine of universal tolerance and be able to sift the grain from the chaff.

One can do philosophy in a bottom-up manner; beginning from preliminary inquiries into the meaning of the universe to arrive at certain conclusions, which may or may not be true. The theologian, on the other hand, begins with faith and then shows to the world that her or his faith is verifiable as true. Unlike the philosopher, the knowledge of the theologian is borne out of her or his prior fidelity to the truth, to natural justice, and the laws of God. That philosophy is theology which has been confirmed finally by women and men renounces as being helpful to the journey in God-realisation. What the Hindu theologian proves must be first ratified by those Hindus who practise a spiritual life and have these qualities defined in Hindu scriptures: 'Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga, charity, self-control, and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity and uprightness.'¹⁵

Christianity has survived since it has allowed inculturation; Hinduism too can rise over the crimson tide if Hindu theologians learn from the history of religions. There is no harm done to the Sanatana Dharma in reaching out to those who remain oblivious of this great religion. This reaching out can be set in motion by vigorous Hindu theologising in every aspect of Hindu lives. ❧

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India's Ethnicity in the Eyes of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Sandarshananda

THE ARYANS MAY HAVE MIGRATED from outside India but that doesn't prove that they were more civilized. They were nomads and covered long distances in search of a place suitable for settlement. Proceeding east, they found the tropical atmosphere of Indian subcontinent suitable. The region was full of beautiful mountains, rivers, and forests along with expanses of fertile land. The Aryans had the expertise in animal husbandry and use of horse. They had to learn agriculture from the aborigine Dravidians who were by then advanced in its science. They settled in India after intermittent war and peace with the aborigines. Hence, one can presume that the Aryans grew through interactions with the indigenous people.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'The Dravidians were a non-aryan race of Central Asia who preceded the Aryans, and those of Southern India were the most civilised. Women with them stood higher than men. They subsequently divided, some going to Egypt, others to Babylonia, and the rest remaining in India.'¹ It is a revolutionary concept which contradicts the prevalent notion that Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations are anterior to Indian civilization, and that the latter might not have any direct link with the former two, unless through Indus valley civilization, if at all. But Swamiji passed away much before the Indus valley civilization was archaeologically discovered, with the impression that it might 'be an older civilization than any yet known to historians'.

Swamiji's idea is being corroborated by the fact that iron was used, not copper, in South India at the beginning of the age of metal, immediately succeeding the last phase of the Stone Age, meaning the Neolithic Age. Since the contemporary Aryans who settled in North India did not know the use of iron, as it required an advanced knowledge for its extraction, the Dravidians could be deemed 'superior' by dint of their higher proficiency in science. And that the Dravidians were identical with the people of Central Asia is held to be somewhat right. But it is a paradox that they advanced from Central Asia to Egypt and Babylonia in two different factions. 'The Egyptians entered into Egypt from a southern country called Punt, across the seas. Some say that that Punt is the modern Malabar, and that the Egyptians and Dravidians belong to the same race' (7.367). More penetrating research is required to unravel its mystery. Swamiji was not one who would say things without reason. Likewise, he says: 'The Ceylonese are not Dravidians but pure Aryans. It was colonised from Bengal about 800 B.C., and they have kept a very clear history of their country from that time' (8.395).

Views such as these given by Swamiji should open fresh debates helping scholars to write a more dependable history of mankind. As for the question of women standing above men in the early Dravidian society, similarly nothing definite can be said, until we are able to discover the source from which he draws this conclusion.

But, conjecturally, he must have had intimately noticed certain practices among the Dravidian women which gave him an inkling; and it thus became discernible to him that those practices had percolated down the ages from the ancient times of our civilization. However, whatever may be the truth, there was indeed a period in which our women enjoyed ample social liberty. Will Durant points out: 'Nevertheless, woman enjoyed far greater freedom in the Vedic period than in later India. She had more to say in the choice of her mate than the forms of marriage might suggest. She appeared freely at feasts and dances, and joined with men in religious sacrifice. She could study, and might, like Gargi, engage in philosophical disputation. If she was left a widow there were no restrictions upon her remarriage.'² It will not be unreasonable if one visualizes the same to have been enjoyed by Indian women before the Vedic age. After all it is the same people who usher in the transmogrification of their social culture, keeping the beneficial values and making room for others in places of the redundant ones.

Spectacular Speculations

Swamiji's perception of India gives a new vision for Indological studies. He takes India's view from two different angles—one is of a mature historian and the other of a proficient critic—they ultimately mingle in him to lend his originality. From the former, in a few masterly strokes he draws a picture of her past thus:

A veritable ethnological museum! Possibly, the half-ape skeleton of the recently discovered Sumatra link will be found on search here, too. The Dolmens are not wanting. Flint implements can be dug out almost anywhere. The lake-dwellers—at least the river-dwellers—must have been abundant at one time. The cave-men and leaf-wearers still persist. The primitive hunters living in forests are in evidence in various parts of the country. Then there are the more historical

varieties—the Negrito-kolarian, the Dravidian, and the Aryan. To these have been added from time to time dashes of nearly all the known races, and a great many yet unknown—various breeds of Mongoloids, Mongols, Tartars, and the so-called Aryans of the philologists. Well, here are the Persian, the Greek, the Yunchi, the Hun, the Chin, the Scythian, and many more, melted and fused, the Jews, Parsees, Arabs, Mongols, down to the descendants of the Vikings and the lords of the German forests, yet undigested—an ocean of humanity, composed of these race-waves seething, boiling, struggling, constantly changing form, rising to the surface, and spreading, and swallowing little ones, again subsiding—this is the history of India.³

The root, from which our civilization has grown, according to Vivekananda, is not as simple as it is often conceived. Like others, he too accepts 'Aryanisation' of our country, cutting across diverse ethnic groups, as true; but he, nevertheless, believes at the same time that it has happened more through an intricate process of sharing and assimilation of values than by any other means. It was a long drawn out process that slowly transformed the country into a common culture. It may so happen that Indians themselves adopted the appellation 'Arya', in order to signify the highest attainment, in terms of spiritual as well as secular values, in human beings. Besides, the fact that the word 'Arya' was incorporated into the Sanskrit lexicography with definite etymological senses also suggests that the term is of Indian origin. One of the many meanings derived from it is 'to lift', that perfectly matches with the idea Swamiji propounds. He is of the opinion that the process of 'Aryanisation', a social and spiritual regeneration, of the Dravidians, which at one point of time swamped the entire land, took place gradually, progressing through every aspect of their lives. It is to him a propitiatory process for the re-awakening of the people. In any case, the fact that

the Aryans did not take possession of the land in one attempt is generally agreeable. Indologist A L Basham says: 'The Aryan invasion in India is not a single concerted action, but one covering centuries and involving many tribes, perhaps not all of the same race and language.'⁴ Hence, the hallmark of Indian culture is a compounded feature that has compelling calls for Orientalists over the centuries. The Latin motto 'light comes from the orient' of The Royal Asiatic Society in Britain is a sort of testimony to this.

And from the latter, Swamiji draws the conclusion: 'We stick, in spite of Western theories, to that definition of the word "Arya" which we find in our sacred books, and which includes only the multitude we now call Hindus. This Aryan race, itself a mixture of two great races, Sanskrit-speaking and Tamil-speaking, applies to all Hindus alike. That the Shudras have in some Smritis been excluded from this epithet means nothing, for the Shudras were and still are only the waiting Aryas—aryas in novitiate.'⁵ Evidently, to Swamiji, anything that is noble and laudable in us is of the Aryan descent. He considers evolution of the Aryan culture in India as an accomplishment of the highest order; and it is not the contribution of a single race that makes it possible. For example, the caste system exercised by it is 'one of the greatest social institutions'. But its 'legitimate fructifications' are 'thwarted' in various ways. Otherwise, it is destined to lead us to a useful goal.

Reflecting Swamiji's thought, Dr Radhakrishnan describes the purpose of caste system: 'Caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of Divine appointment. It is an attempt to regulate society with a view to actual and ideal unity.'⁶ He further explained its ramifications:

The different functions of the human life were clearly separated and their specific and complementary character was recognized. Each caste

has its social purpose and function. It is a close corporation equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, observing certain usages regarding food and marriage. Each group is free to pursue its own aims free from interference by others. The functions of the different castes were regarded as equally important to the well being of the whole. The serenity of the teacher, the heroism of the warrior, the honesty of the businessman, and the patience and energy of the worker all contribute to the social growth. Each has its own perfection' (77).

According to Swamiji, the concept of caste is a landmark achievement of our ancestors. Within it lie the germs of full manifestation of the human potential as well as the blessings of manifold progress in society. The Sanskrit word for 'caste' is '*jati*', species. It bears the idea of 'creation' along with the prospect of 'variation'. And variation brings diversity—diversity stemmed fetches annihilation. 'So long as any species is vigorous and active, it must throw out varieties. When it ceases or is stopped from breeding varieties, it dies. Now the original idea of Jati was this freedom of the individual to express his nature, his Prakriti, his Jati, his caste; and so it remained for thousands of years.'⁷ The caste system in practice today is 'not the real jati, but a hindrance to its progress' (ibid.). It is practically preventing its free action. 'Any crystallized custom, or privilege, or hereditary class in any shape' obstructs it 'from its full sway' (ibid.). And whenever such a thing happens in a nation, failing to produce variety in human beings, the result is disastrous. Swamiji cites the examples of Europe and America for the propitious consequences of caste. He says when they 'took away most of the barriers that stood in the way of individuals, each developing his caste' (ibid.), they rose. Therefore he suggests its 'full sway again' for our complete regeneration. The current confusion regarding caste is because of its misinterpretation and misrepresentation with

ulterior motives. Swamiji gave a full-throated voice in favour of scientific implementation of caste in society and said: 'This variety does not mean inequality, nor any special privilege' (373).

Swamiji's conviction was that, 'Whatever may be the import of the philological terms "Aryan" and "Tamilian", even taking for granted that both these grand sub-divisions of Indian humanity came from outside the Western frontier, the dividing line had been, from the most ancient times, one of language and not of blood' (299). He appreciates *varnashrama* practised by the Aryans because it was 'very flexible, sometimes too flexible to ensure a healthy uprise of the races very low in the scale of culture' (297). The terms Brahmin, Kshatriya, and so on 'simply represent status of a community' (298), which is in a state of flux. So those who are stationed at the uppermost rung of society have to prove their superiority over others by manifesting spirituality and 'by raising others to the same status' (300). Swamiji sent them a word of caution lest they would grow proud and oppressive, having enjoyed the maximum respect as well as authority in society. The false ego generated from birth in higher caste was repugnant to him. He said: 'Beware, Brahmins, this is the sign of death! Arise and show your manhood, your Brahminhood, by raising the non-brahmins around you—not in the spirit of a master—not with the rotten canker of egotism crawling with superstitions and the charlatanry of East and West—but in the spirit of a servant. For verily he who knows how to serve knows how to rule' (300).

Society is now badly class-ridden. There is a deliberate endeavour to multiply classes on the plea of economic progress. Policy of the purse covertly disintegrates humanity into countless classes, which is potentially detrimental. Blocking the efficacy of caste, we have given way to a naked competition and a free rein to its breeding that is slowly pushing us back to the savagery we left at the dawn

of civilization. Swamiji abhorred class, for he had observed how every extra dollar earned created a new class in an affluent society like the USA, perpetuating discrimination between man and man all the more vigorously. He saw class to be a sophisticated instrument for social dissension and exploitation, giving a spur to pride and prejudice.

Intriguing Inferences

Vexed by an overemphasis on philology for historical research on the Aryan genesis, Swamiji says: 'A gentle yet clear brushing off of the cobwebs of the so-called Aryan theory and all its vicious corollaries is therefore absolutely necessary, especially for the South, and a proper self-respect created by a knowledge of the past grandeur of one of the great ancestors of the Aryan race—the great Tamilians' (301). Some historians too believe that 'the Dravidians at one time inhabited the whole of India, including the Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan, and gradually migrated to Mesopotamia. The fact that the Dravidian language is still spoken by the Brahui people of Baluchistan is taken to lend strength to this view.'⁸ But ethnically Brahuīs are predominantly Iranians, establishing that Dravidians went outside India towards Sumeria.

Dravidians and Sumerians are also believed to be the same, closely connected with the people of the Indus valley. This cannot be denied altogether. The Egyptians may be connected with the Dravidians through the Sumerians. Swamiji says: 'The borders of this Mediterranean were the birthplace of that European civilisation which has now conquered the world. On these shores the Semitic races such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, and Jews, and the Aryan races such as the Persians, Greeks, and Romans, fused together—to form the modern European civilisation.'⁹

If the Aryans were of extra-Indian origin, then they were divided, as Swamiji held, into two groups—one approaching India and the other

travelling to Greece. He arrived at this conclusion on the basis of his study of Greek culture vis-à-vis Indian culture. He observed that although these two peoples were of identical roots they were nonetheless different in nature because of the strong influences of two different climatic conditions.

The air of India pre-eminently conduces to quietness, the nature of the Yavana [Greek] is the constant expression of power; profound meditation characterises the one, the indomitable spirit of dexterous activity, the other; one's motto is "renunciation", the other's "enjoyment". One's whole energy is directed inwards, the other's, outwards; one's whole learning consists in the knowledge of the Self or the Subject, the other's, in the knowledge of the not-self or the object (perishable creation); one loves Moksha (spiritual freedom), the other loves political independence; one is unmindful of gaining prosperity in this world, the other sets his whole heart on making a heaven of this world; one, aspiring after eternal bliss, is indifferent to all the ephemeral pleasures of this life, and the other, doubting the existence of eternal bliss, or knowing it to be far away, directs his whole energy to the attainment of earthly pleasures as much as possible (4.402).

Swamiji here suggests that the world is divided into two ancient cultures resorting to which the two hemispheres of Earth, the East and the West, developed into two distinct civilizations. He dreamt that they would shake hands for mutual good. But, unfortunately, it seems Kipling's saying 'the twine shall never meet' is not to be incorrect ever, in order to make Swamiji's dream true. In his analysis, there are broadly three types in the Aryan civilization—the Roman, the Greek, the Hindu, differing in characters. 'The Roman type is the type of organization, conquest, steadiness—but lacking in emotional nature, appreciation of beauty and the higher emotions. Its defect is cruelty. The Greek is essentially enthusiastic for the beautiful, but frivolous and has a tendency to become

immoral. The Hindu type is essentially metaphysical and religious, but lacking in all the elements of organization and work' (9.206). He was proud to be of the Hindu type because while 'the whole world is trying to trace its ancestry from men distinguished in arms and wealth, the Hindus alone are proud to trace their descent from saints' (207).

There is yet another 'theory that the "Indus" people were Aryans'. But it is hard to believe, since each has an individuality of its own as a people with specific expression of development. Even then, exchange at various levels among them could have happened to justify their perceptible resemblance on certain aspects. Examining the appearances and languages of the people of our country now, we come across four types of them, namely 'the majority high-class Hindus,' 'the people mostly living in the South Indian Peninsula,' 'primitive tribes living in hills and jungles,' and 'a people with strong Mongolian features' who 'live on the slopes of Himalayas and mountains of Assam'. The last two are descendants of the Neolithic peoples. Of them, the primitive people have not made 'any appreciable progress during the thousands of years' last. 'There is hardly any doubt that these primitive races at one time spread all over India. But they had to yield to the superior forces of the Dravidians, who gradually occupied some of their lands. The same process was repeated when large tracts of the country were conquered at a later time by the Aryans.'¹⁰ Though some of the ancient races extant have not changed much externally, yet they could be assumed to have come in touch with the influence of the culture of the Aryans, which eventually endowed them with a sense of belonging to this country on the basis of a realized unity with others.

The idea that the people of South India were different from the people of North India was not tenable to Swamiji. He did not observe any other difference between them than the difference

of language. 'There may have been a Dravidian people who vanished from here, and the few who remained lived in forests and other places. Quite possibly the language may have been taken up, but all these are Aryans who came from the North. The whole of India is Aryan, nothing else.'¹¹ All other theories appeared to him quaint and ridiculous. The truth is, he says, 'there is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryan ever came from anywhere outside of India, and in ancient India was included Afghanistan. There it ends' (293). Similarly, the theory that multitudes of Shudras were non-Aryans was unacceptable to him. It is unbelievable that numerous indigenous slaves are at the command of a handful of alien Aryans, showing no physical reactions to them. His explanation in this regard is that there was only one caste in the beginning, 'the Brahmins, and then by difference of occupation they went on dividing themselves into different castes' (ibid.).

Swamiji observes poetically: 'Onward through several centuries, we come to a multitude surrounded by the snows of the Himalayas on the north and the heat of the south—vast plains, interminable forests through which mighty rivers roll their tides. We catch a glimpse of different races—Dravidians, Tartars, and Aborigines pouring in their quota of blood, of speech, of manners and religions. And at last a great nation emerges to our view—still keeping the type of the Aryan—stronger, broader, and more organized by the assimilation. We find the central assimilative core giving its type and character to the whole mass clinging on with great pride to its name of "Aryan", and, though willing to give other races the benefits of its civilization, it was by no means willing to admit them within the "Aryan" pale' (6.159).

Epilogue

There is a subtle phenomenon in the Indian way of life, powerful enough to hold Indians together

as a nation with a common identity, notwithstanding diverse appearances, languages, beliefs, and faiths. This indeed is the 'Indianness' about which Swamiji urges Indians to remain conscious through the thick and thin of the struggle for existence. Clearly, he held the Aryans in high esteem because of their achievements in science, religion, philosophy, literature, arts, and above all spirituality that present India gloriously before the world. To him their life story is an account of the best development of human resources, which is captured in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Numerous characters of these two epics are our cherished heritage for millennia; and they form the basis of our thoughts and of our moral and ethical ideas. Praising these two literary works, he says: 'In fact, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the two encyclopaedias of the ancient Aryan life and wisdom, portraying an ideal civilisation which humanity has yet to aspire after' (4.101).

Swamiji was worshipful to everything Aryan. He looked upon its influence as auspicious and wanted that every child born in India should be Aryan. He said: 'I may remark that according to Manu a child who is born of lust is not an Aryan. The child whose very conception and whose death is according to the rules of the Vedas, such is an Aryan. Yes, and less of these Aryan children are being produced in every country, and the result is the mass of evil which we call Kali Yuga' (3.409).


Swamiji's inquisitive mind delved deep into the Aryan history. His inquiring search divulged the truth that the Aryans never snatched 'away the lands of the aborigines' and drove them out. He took it to be 'pure nonsense' and considered such ideas 'monstrous lies,' propagated with vested interest. He is overtly distrustful of the intellectual foibles like the Aryans hailed from Central Asia, Central Tibet, North Pole, Swiss Lake, and other areas. Swamiji registers his reservation: 'Whenever the Europeans find an opportunity, they

exterminate the aborigines and settle down in ease and comfort on their lands; and therefore they think the Aryans must have done the same!' (5,535).

Sri Ramachandra was struck by the grandeur of Lanka, soon after stepping on its soil, following his victory. The people of South India were his 'friends and allies' as they were of the same stock. Perhaps, 'in a few places there were occasional fights between the Aryans and aborigines' (536). Understandably, aborigines with sticks and stones could not be compared with the Aryans armed with swords, bows, and arrows 'on fiery steeds'. Swamiji gives his observation in imagery thus: 'The loom of the fabric of Aryan civilisation is a vast, warm, level country, interspersed with broad, navigable rivers. The cotton of this cloth is composed of highly civilised, semi-civilised, and barbarian tribes, mostly Aryan. Its warp is Varnashramachara, and its woof, the conquest of strife and competition in nature' (ibid.). He remarks that in occupying other countries, Europeans never raised them to better conditions. They exterminated them by the roots, as if they were beastly, when they found their races weaker. This is evidenced by the histories of America, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and South Africa.

Swamiji infers that the Aryans did not come from outside India and believes that the Aryans from India went to different parts of the world to spread a more civilized way of life. This seems plausible because the Dravidians, believed to have covered most of the earth, are in Swamiji's perception, non-different from the Aryans. Their message was of peace and progress through the division into *varnas*, which is a ladder to rise above 'in proportion to one's learning and culture'. Swamiji's appraisal about them is lofty. 'The Aryans were kind and generous; and in their hearts which were large and unbounded as the ocean, and in their brains, gifted with superhuman genius, all these ephemeral and apparently

pleasant but virtually beastly processes never found a place' (537). India was a melting pot which produced a universal culture that had a bearing on every nation for its civilization.

Swami Vivekananda's predictions about the Aryans are thought-provoking. In our own interest, we can ill-afford to remain indifferent to them. Replacing the myths and deceptions, we have to draw the correct conclusions regarding our ancestors. The fact that some erudite historians also confirm Swamiji's view is evident from Will Durant: 'In the days when historians supposed that history had begun with Greece, Europe gladly believed that India had been a hotbed of barbarism until the "Aryan" cousins of the European peoples had migrated from the shores of the Caspian to bring the arts and sciences to a savage and benighted peninsula. Recent researches have marred this comforting picture—as future researches will change the perspective of these pages.'¹² He asks whether India is the oldest civilization. Maybe Swamiji's assertion is the only logical answer to the question with its needed affirmation. 

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Harmony through the Fine Arts

Swami Madhurananda

IN THE CONTEXT of ‘Unity in Diversity’¹ in the fine arts, we will use the traditional classification of the fine arts, which includes the seven basic arts: music, dance, drama, literature, architecture, painting, and sculpture.² The reason is that all the fine arts have one essential element in common. Moreover, we are discussing this topic from an Indian perspective, where the relation among all the arts is closer than in other cultures. To quote from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

The relation of the various arts to each other is very close in South Asia, where proficiency in several arts is necessary for specialization in any one. Thus, it is believed that without a good knowledge of dance there can be no proficiency in sculpture, for dance, like painting or sculpture, is a depiction of all the world. For its rhythmic movements and exposition of emotion, dance also requires musical accompaniments; hence, knowledge of musical rhythm is essential. For the stirring of emotion either in music or in dance, knowledge of literature and rhetoric is believed to be necessary; the flavour (*rasa*) to be expressed in music, dance, sculpture, or painting requires a literary background. Thus all the arts are closely linked together.³

We are about to deal with harmony through the fine arts, but before finding the harmony in them, we need to find that common factor, that unity behind the diversity of the fine arts, that without which no art is worth being called so.

Brahman in the Arts

Brahman is the unity behind the diversity in creation and it manifests itself first in certain

principles, certain essentials. Each field of knowledge or science has as its object of study one or more of these universal principles. In Swami Vivekananda’s words:

Every science must end where it finds a unity, because we cannot go any further. When a perfect unity is reached, that science has nothing more of principles to tell us. ... Take any science, chemistry, for example. Suppose we can find one element out of which we can manufacture all the other elements. Then chemistry, as a science, will have become perfect. What will remain for us is to discover every day new combinations of that one material and the application of those combinations for all the purposes of life.⁴

In the field of physics the essential elements are akasha and *prana*, matter and energy—or vibration as Swamiji preferred to translate the word *prana*. All of physics is the study of the variations and permutations of these two elements, akasha and *prana*. The moment it was mathematically proved that they are exchangeable, that one is the other in a different form, physics touched its bottom, it reached its unifying factor. Beyond akasha and *prana* there is only one thing, Brahman. From the angle of physics then, we say that Brahman has manifested itself first through akasha and *prana*.

Take another example: what is the unifying factor in the social sciences, their basic object of study? It is the human mind. All the social sciences—from anthropology and sociology to politics and economics—are the study of the

variations of the human mind, the individual and the collective mind. Beyond that there is only one thing, the Atman.

Now, what is that through which Brahman has manifested itself in the fine arts? What is that unifying factor behind all the arts? As we are, in one sense, made of *akasha* and *prana*, as we all have a mind, the essential element common to the fine arts is in us too, and that is *bhava*. The unifying factor in the fine arts is *bhava*. Without *bhava* there is no art.

Swami Vivekananda said: 'All poetry, painting, and music is feeling expressed through words, through colour, through sound' (7.31). Swamiji used the word 'feeling' because he was addressing a varied non-Indian audience. But there is no proper equivalent in English for the Sanskrit word *bhava*. In the fine arts, if we translate this word as 'feeling' or 'mood' or 'emotion', we miss some of its important aspects. For example, we would never associate feeling or emotion with algebra or geometry or mathematics. However, the exact sciences are part of the artistic *bhava* as well. An architect, or anyone who is able to understand fine architecture, is forced to have knowledge of algebra and physics. True painters and sculptors have an intuitive knowledge of geometry to handle the tensions and the forms in any media they use to express their particular *bhava*. Fine musicians may not be good at solving mathematical equations, but they have a high sense of mathematics—to some Greek philosophers like Pythagoras, music is another form of mathematics. Therefore, *bhava* is much more than feeling or mood or emotion.

Again, if we translate this word as 'artistic sensitivity' or 'the quality to produce or perceive art', we may be closer to the concept, but immediately many may feel that 'I am not artistically sensitive' or 'I may be sensitive with regard to some of the arts, but not to all of them', while the truth is that all of us can develop our *bhava*

to appreciate or connect with any artistic production. If we try to explain *bhava* as 'being in tune or in contact with the essence of art or the spirit of a particular art', we may be still closer to grasping its import, but this sounds a bit too ambitious, like something reserved for a few gifted people; and again we miss the point, because anyone can interact at different levels with any work of art.

Bhava and Rasa

The word *bhava* has different connotations according to the context in which it is used—in the bhakti schools it means one thing, while in yoga philosophy it means quite another. In the field of aesthetics it helps to understand that the word is derived from the Sanskrit root *bhu*, which means 'to be', 'to exist', 'to become'. Therefore, *bhava* has to do with existence, with becoming, with something very essential in us, and not merely with a taste for the arts.

Bhava is not *rasa*. This is known to anyone acquainted with Indian aesthetics, but unfortunately these two concepts are generally confused in common parlance. *Rasa* is the aesthetic experience derived from any form of art by both the artist, at the time of artistic production, and the *rasika*, the one who experiences art, by being in contact with an artwork. *Rasa* is evoked by *bhava*; so *bhava* is at the centre of *rasa*. To philosophize, it can be said that in the arts *bhava* is the universal principle, as *akasha* and *prana* are to physics or the human mind—in this case the *mahat*, universal mind—is to the humanities; while *rasa* is the varied expressions of that universal principle.

In the Indian tradition of art, the aesthetic experience that comes through the *bhava* of the *rasika*, of the perceiver, is considered as important as the *bhava* of the artist or the *bhava* expressed in an artwork. Only in the last century the West started to discuss, in what is called modern art,

the importance of the aesthete's capacity to experience art as the factor that completes the process of art, while in India the *bhava* of the *rasika* has been acknowledged from millennia.⁵

Artistic *bhava*, however, has no frontiers, no cultural limiting borders. It is a universal principle present in all of us. An incident to illustrate: Several years ago, as a university student in Buenos Aires, I listened to a sitar recital immediately after completing a difficult exam. Today Indian classical musicians perform all around the world, but twenty-five years ago it was rare to listen to a sitarist from India playing in a South American country. It was a free concert in a small theatre. I felt that the play was neither deep nor skilful, but attributed this feeling to my mental exhaustion after the exam. When the recital was over, a middle-aged local person in the audience stood up and said to the artist: 'Sir, you have come all the way from India to perform for free and yet you have not given your best!' The sitarist and his retinue were stunned. I guess they never imagined that people in the other side of the world, with such a different cultural and musical background, would be so sensitive and knowledgeable about Indian classical music. Perhaps, the artist felt the remark was true and so he played for half an hour more, and this time the recital was good indeed.

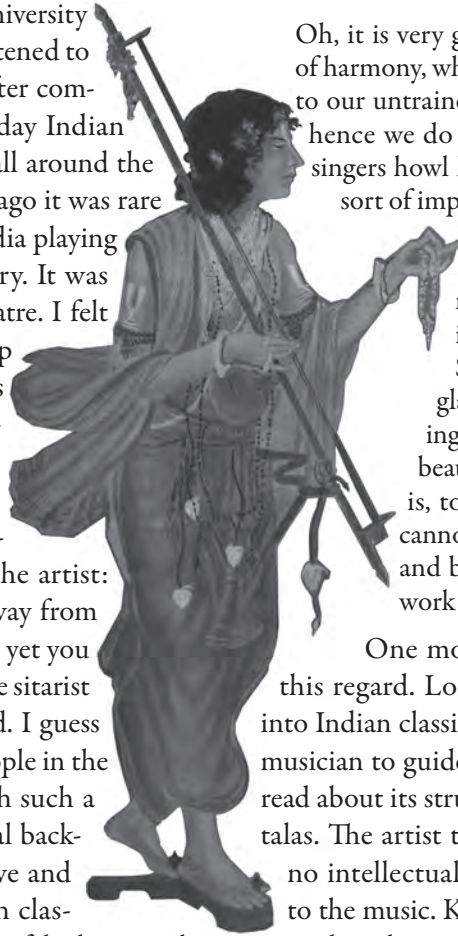
Harmony with Creation

Till now we have discussed the theory. But we cannot stop at the theory; we have to make it practical. The question then is how can we develop *bhava* in relation to the fine arts? The first step

to develop artistic *bhava* is to try to be more and more exposed to the arts in general, first to the artistic productions of one's culture and then to those of other cultures. This regular contact with the fine arts gradually gives a basic taste for them. Once Swami Shivananda asked Swami Vivekananda: 'What is Western music like?' and Swamiji replied:

Oh, it is very good; there is in it a perfection of harmony, which we have not attained. Only, to our untrained ears, it does not sound well, hence we do not like it, and think that the singers howl like jackals. I also had the same sort of impression, but when I began to listen to the music with attention and study it minutely, I came more and more to understand it, and I was lost in admiration. Such is the case with every art. In glancing at a highly finished painting we cannot understand where its beauty lies. Moreover, unless the eye is, to a certain extent, trained, one cannot appreciate the subtle touches and blendings, the inner genius of a work of art.⁶

One more personal story to share in this regard. Long back I wanted to go deep into Indian classical music and asked an Indian musician to guide me, to give me something to read about its structure—the ragas, *raginis*, and talas. The artist told me not to read anything, no intellectual approach at first. 'Just listen to the music. Keep on listening until you feel you have been able to achieve an intuitive understanding of Indian classical music,' he said. In other words, he was encouraging me to be in contact with the *bhava* of this form of art. And I have done this for several years. He gave me a lot of music by great Indian maestros of the main instruments. It was only after many years that I started reading about the structure of Indian classical music.




And one never stops learning, grasping nuances at deep levels. Because it is the deep level of *bhava* that take us to the spiritual dimension of any art, that keeps us in contact with God. This is another important reason for using the word *bhava* in art without translation, as in this word is implied the final spiritual dimension of all the arts. To quote again from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 'The arts were cultivated in South Asia not only as a noble pastime but also in a spirit of dedication, as an offering to a god.'⁷ Through an intense, deep, authentic *bhava* in the arts we can approach the Truth, we can realize God, which is the goal of human life. And an effective way to intensify our *bhava* through the fine arts is to follow the same process we use for the study of the Shastras: *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana*. First we should be exposed to the arts, as much as possible; then we study them, reflect on them; and finally we go deep in a constant tune with their essence. If this process is followed, we achieve harmony not only within us but also with other cultures and their ways of producing art. In the end, through art, we find harmony with the whole creation.

A Request

Please do not discourage your children, do not discourage any youth from pursuing an artistic career if they have an inclination towards it. Do not try to push them to be doctors or lawyers or engineers if in their hearts they do not want to be that. There is a lot of prestige in an artistic career. Of the last ten Bharat Ratnas—the highest civil award granted by the Government of India, four went to performers of the fine arts, unlike in previous cases where the award was granted mainly to statesmen or philosophers. This is a sign that people appreciate the fine arts a lot. A dedicated artistic career is a great contribution to the upliftment of people. To produce good artists, good teachers are also required. Patronage of the fine arts comes generally from

people who have sensitivity for and knowledge of the arts and that is developed better from an early age. Sister Nivedita, one of the foremost disciples of Swami Vivekananda, could have chosen to work through any of the multiple fields that Swamiji worked in, but she chose mainly two: education and the arts. She not only supported many Indian artists but also introduced appreciation of art in her school. She knew that teaching appreciation of the arts to the masses, instead of only to the elites, is essential to recover and then reaffirm a cultural identity, an identity that contributes to the culture of the whole world.

To conclude, one quote from Swami Vivekananda: 'The artistic faculty was highly developed in our Lord, Shri Ramakrishna, and he used to say that without this faculty none can be truly spiritual.'⁸ We all have that artistic faculty in us; let us develop it at a higher level. 

Notes and References

1. This article is based on a talk given by the author in the session 'Unity in Diversified Arts' of the seminar on 'Unity in Diversity' held at Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot from 6 to 8 February 2014.
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Forgive and Forget—A Riddle

Swami Kritarthananda

The Paradox

RAVANA, SORELY STRICKEN WITH GRIEF at the ghastly death of his son Indrajit in the hands of Lakshmana, appeared in battle array before Rama to settle the final score. But the mental shock made him tired and weak. This did not elude the eyes of Rama. The embodiment of mercy that he was, Rama ordered his arch-rival, who abducted his beloved wife Sita, to go back and rest until he regained his strength and vigour, and then come back for the decisive battle. This was a signal example of forgiving the enemy who was at his mercy. The brave Hindu kings of yore are said to possess this distinct, legendary quality of forgiveness.

In striking contrast, in a fierce battle between Arjuna and Karna, when the wheel of Karna's chariot got stuck in the mud, he begged Arjuna for a few moments' ceasefire. Arjuna wanted to comply, but Sri Krishna prodded him to vanquish the enemy in that unguarded moment. The upshot is known to all. Karna succumbed to the fatal injury on his back—a breach of battle-codes! In other words, forgiveness was not accorded to Karna.

The Bhagavata narrates the story of King Parikshit, the descendant of the Pandava clan. Once he went out on a hunting spree in a forest. After a wild chase he became tired and overcome with thirst and hunger. A little while later he espied a hermitage in which the sage Shamika was sitting, lost in ecstasy. The king's repeated calls met with no response. Impatient with the sage, the king collected a dead snake from the vicinity, hung it

round the neck of the meditating sage, and left the place in a huff. The sage had a young son who had gone outdoors on an errand. On his return he was furious to see the humiliating sight. Meanwhile his father came back to normal consciousness and innocently asked the reason for his son's wrath. When his son angrily told him of the king's offence, sage Shamika only stuck to the noble virtue of forgiveness. But before the father could warn him, the enraged son had spat out his curse: 'The king will no more see the light of the earth after seven days. He will be fatally bitten by a venomous snake.' Here the father forgave but the son did not. The author of the Bhagavata beautifully depicted and concluded this epoch-making event in just a couple of verses with these comments:

*Iti putrakritaghena so anutapto mahamunih,
svayam viprakrito rajna naivagham tadacintayat.
prayashah sadhavo loke parairdvandveshu yojitah,
na vyathanti na hrishyanti yatatma'gunashrayah.*

Thus the sage regretted on hearing the enraged curse of his son; yet he never dwelt on the wrong done to him by the king [Parikshit]. It is quite frequent that in this world there are holy men who do not feel miserable or happy at the contradictory behaviours from others. To them the atman is free from all attributes of nature [Prakriti].¹

Sri Ramakrishna's shadow companion Hriday had served him a lot. But in later days he became puffed up with vanity and every now and then hurled insolent comments at Sri Ramakrishna. Once the offence crossed the limit of his tolerance. Yet Sri Ramakrishna did not revile him. Months later, as ill luck would have it; Hriday incurred the wrath of the temple authorities on

some other grounds and was dismissed from the temple forever. One day, a repentant Hriday came to his senses and went to Dakshineswar to meet Sri Ramakrishna. As he was refused entry into the temple precincts, Sri Ramakrishna himself went to the gate and enquired of his welfare. The poor, repentant Hriday fell flat at his uncle's feet, crying aloud. Sri Ramakrishna consoled him, and in mercy his eyes also became flooded with tears. In other words, he forgave his tormentor.

Some of the above stories are outstanding examples of forgiveness while others are exceptions. These examples, again, give rise to certain pertinent questions. To put it in the poet's language, 'to forgive or not to forgive; that is the question'. Our great epics and scriptures must guide us in the way of living. And in all our interpersonal dealings one of the important points that comes up is, 'when to forgive and when not to'. The apparently conflicting stories above may confuse us. At times in our life we forgive others; but they revile us in return. Naturally the question comes: should we have rather not forgiven? Was it a mistake to forgive?

The phrase 'forgive and forget' has, of late, become almost a cliché. Most parents, with a view to settling certain issues, and in fear of losing peace, advise their children to 'forgive and forget' when the latter flares up against someone due to some valid reason. Or when superiors find themselves at the losing end in a heated exchange of words, finding no other avenues of escape, they use this sort of chicanery to bring the debate to a dead stop. But ironically enough, when their turn comes to forgive and forget, they miserably fail to hold on to the maxim and rationalize their attitude of retaliation. Little do they realise that such lapses on their part only betray their malice and impotence—both these traits are poorly suited to be human qualities, much less divine.



Hriday holding Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

So in the final analysis, though people know clearly that to forgive is a noble quality, though people in general flippantly sermonise about this great quality, they fail to practise forgiveness. We shall now proceed to discuss the reasons thereof.

Reasons for Failure to Forgive

The first reason is human weakness. Weak people can never forgive others. Within their hearts they nurture the deep-seated sense of deprivation. To forgive others one has to be stronger than others. Swami Vivekananda said that only that person who can give a blow for a blow, who can hit back, has the capacity to forgive. This was precisely the reason why he was so vociferous on developing inner strength first. His concept of education was to restore the lost confidence of the race. For a weakling the only logical course of action will be to hold a grudge, backbite, or complain perpetually.

A person once approached Swamiji and divulged his desire to know God. Seeing his emaciated structure Swamiji understood his incapability; so he asked, 'Can you tell a lie?' The scandalized person answered in the negative, at which Swamiji said, 'Then you must learn to do so. It is better to tell a lie than to be a brute, or a log of wood. You are inactive; you have not certainly reached the highest state, which is beyond all actions, calm and serene; you are too dull even to do something wicked.'² In other words, Swami Vivekananda insisted that strength, and not weakness, should be the prerequisite to spiritual life.

The second reason is the deep-seated feeling of hatred towards others. This may be rooted in a humiliating insult from others or come from being badly victimized by evil-minded people or from suppression by superiors or a powerful authority. A large number of the world's populace harbour, in psychological parlance, a typical instinct in them known as 'death instinct'. It expresses itself in unreasonable domination over others, suppression of others' talents, causing humiliation to others, and so on. This trait may also be triggered by people in power through their studied neglect, refusal to recognize others' talents, and in many other ways.

For such people with a 'death instinct', even forgiving others implies conditional forgiveness. The other name for this is making slaves of others. These people use such high-sounding words as 'obedience like a dog', 'unconditional obedience', and so on only in order to hoodwink naive people. They want their subordinates to do everything at their whimsical command in return for some physical comforts and false sense of security from the world. Most of their victims give in just for the sake of the little comforts of life they get. But those who cannot be content with such petty achievements will treat such

superiors as the sworn enemy of humankind. Far from forgiving, these oppressed people, out of deep hatred, will seek every opportunity to upset their opponents.

As a third reason it can be said that when we feel hurt at others' adverse comments or behaviour, we go on reliving the experience by repeatedly remembering it or narrating it to others. Each time we remember, the impulses that should have come out at the time of its happening bubble up in the mind making it a slave of the impulse. A lot of our energy gets siphoned off in this way. The pictures associated with the memory go on adding impulses each time we relive it. At last it takes the form of a huge wave and hooks our will which, thus enslaved by the wrongly directed mental waves, makes a *samkalpa*, resolve, to take revenge. An enslaved will cannot forgive others. To forgive in the right spirit one needs to be a master of the will.

Once a disciple asked Jesus Christ, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?' He gave a significant reply: 'Seventy times seven.'³ Why did he say so? Because though, perhaps, the sin was committed only once, we go on mentally reliving the offence for the umpteenth time. This is not only meaningless but also harmful on a subjective basis. A monk, while bathing in a river saw a young lady being helplessly carried away by the current and crying out for help. He swam to her and rescued her. The news spread with some aspersion on the monk. He was summoned to a covey of his brother monks and was challenged for his breach of monastic conduct. But the monk gave a rejoinder indifferently: 'I have left the woman on the bank, while you are carrying her still in your heart!'

Why are we not able to digest the hurts and misbehaviours inflicted on us by others? It is because we fail to make our heart large enough to merge all such petty feelings into it. And in order

to make our heart spacious enough to contain others' feelings we must know the art of loving others. It is the lack of mature love that forces us to recoil from forgiving others. This, then, is the fourth reason of our failure to forgive. To love another person, a deep understanding is necessary—understanding of my own capacities and limitations, and also those of the person I love. Tussles are unavoidable in interpersonal dealings. None is born perfect. Awareness of this truth helps us cement the bonds of love. Without this awareness, all temporal loves get reduced to love-hate relationships.

The fifth reason is our inability to hold fast to our human identity. On analysis it is found that people take advantage of our foolishness or lack of knowledge in certain worldly affairs. Most people are hell-bent on growing at others' cost. In the name of love they use sweet, sugar-coated lip-service to exact from us our rich reserve. When we realize the breach, it is already too late; we have been already duped. People take the upper hand with us not for our goodness—the inherent asset of all of us—but for our foolishness. One is hit on one's vulnerable aspect of character. So, instead of howling at others' misdemeanours, if we concentrate more on patching the chink in our armour, if we take just the needed lesson from our bitter experiences and insist on holding on more to our human identity, forgiveness will stop being a cause of conflict in us. By 'holding on to human identity' is meant learning the correct lesson from our failures, making ourselves immune to further onslaughts, and forging ahead instead of dwelling on others' depravity, which may degrade us from our human nature. Acharya Shankara, in his comments on the sixty-third verse of the second chapter of the Bhagavadgita, clearly states that one can hold on to one's human identity only as long as she or he can distinguish between

what ought to be done and what ought not be done in a particular situation: '*Karyakarya-vishaya-viveka-yogyam*, fit to distinguish between what ought to be done and what ought not be done.' Lack of this discrimination renders one unfit to be called a human.

In the long course of evolution, human beings have succeeded in differentiating themselves from all other species; they have come out of their animal sheath and are lording over other lower species. But how far have they truly succeeded in establishing their human identity? That is indeed a relevant question. On close scrutiny it is found that Darwin's epochal theory of the survival of the fittest holds true at the human level also, only in different forms like cut-throat competition, keeping up with others, jealousy, going ahead of others, and so on. The animal propensities sneak out in these forms from behind the human cloak. Acharya Shankara, the advocate of Advaita, and many other sages and seers of India, used terms like *jantu*, creature, *martya*, mortal, and so on to hint at people of this nature. *Jantu* means that which takes birth and dies, while *martya* means a mortal being. The human species shares these traits with animals. If you want to be rooted in your distinction as a human being, you must be cautious about vying for supremacy and such other 'drawbacks' of human life. The tendency to go ahead of others is like a canker in human civilization. It is the most crucial factor in our inability to forgive others. Hence we earmark it as the sixth reason.

The last reason, though not the least, is our inability to forgive ourselves. Sounds strange? Indeed, many people, for all their good qualities, foster a deep hatred for themselves since childhood. This is not an inherent trait. Rather, such traits are thrust upon people by the other members of the family by way of negative, pessimistic training, sharp criticism at the slightest lapse or

inadvertence, jeering at others' failure, cornering or expressly boycotting of one person by all others as a single unit, or making one the butt of ridicule of all others. All these actions stunt the mental growth of a child who develops self-hatred as an outcome of all these horrible experiences. One who does not love oneself, but fosters deep self-hatred within, cannot be expected to forgive others under any circumstance. This is the most important of all the factors and, unfortunately, modern society bristles with people of this sort.

Fields of Exception

Forgiveness is indeed a great quality. And it is also a fact, as discussed before, that we fail to forgive others due to many reasons. But now we shall discuss certain fields wherein the trite 'forgive and forget' *must not be applied* if we value human development and love human beings. The world is badly in need of people with blazing characters who may live *in the world* but not become *of the world*.

The first is the area of children and youngsters. They have no mind of their own; it is all an unconscious flow of vital forces acting in and through their persons. Every moment they go on identifying themselves with the surroundings. This is no fault on their part. Yet they should be taught right from childhood to struggle against the stream—rather than floating with the current or conforming to the ways of the majority. When they commit something evil out of ignorance, imitate bad gestures, covet others' possessions, or feel unreasonably jealous of others, they must be dissuaded by their parents or guardians in a way conducive to their all-round development. This seldom happens. Parents either feel emotionally upset at such off-track behaviour of their ward or remain callously indifferent to such harmful behaviour on the plea of love.

Many parents are not themselves groomed properly from their childhood; so they are not clearly aware of the problems on the path of life. Very few people will wholeheartedly accept this fact. But mere acceptance or rejection cannot disprove a truth. The long and short of it is that children and youngsters must be made aware of the facts of both good and evil and their difference from the perspective of higher human values. Without a clear knowledge of the difference between good and evil, human beings cannot transcend them or even grow in life. Most of the tragedies and stunted growth in human life may be traced to ignorance of the ideas of good and evil and their distinction. Moreover, if by lethargy or indulgence of habit youngsters repeatedly commit the same offence, they must be dealt with sternly and firmly. The purpose is not to intimidate them but just to put them on the right track. The affectionate mother may sometimes have to spank the unreasonably importunate child. She is not called a cruel mother or devoid of forgiveness on that score.

The second is the field of work. Our working places are replete with men and women of the protean type. They behave in a highly formal manner while their hearts are set to crass selfishness. Examples are not lacking where the colleague, with a veneer of sweet speech, cooks accounts in such a way that the boss, even though suspicious—maybe even confident—of the breach of trust of the colleague, feels either shy or nervous to approach the accused. Well has it been said by a great thinker of the West in satiric terms: 'Lord, save me from my friends; I shall take care of my enemies!'⁴ In the long run this may pave the way for psychic unsettlement in the honest boss. Hence such cases must be handled with firmness and prior mental preparation.

Last of all, we must be very frank with our own self. Our mind must be forcibly weaned

from all types of harmful indulgence. We must learn to say an emphatic ‘no’ to our own mind. This, however, is more easily said than done. The mind, by nature, is like the child mentioned above; it has no sense of good or bad until ‘someone’ points it out. This someone, again, is the person himself. So the task is all the more difficult, though not impossible.

Forgive, but Don’t Forget

‘To err is human, to forgive divine,’ goes the saying. But judging by human standards it seems that if to err is human, to forgive also is human. Forgiving implies inner strength which is an inherent quality of human beings. It has been found that even when two animals of the same or different species fight with each other for supremacy, and one of them accepts defeat in the decisive duel, the loser makes a gesture by falling flat on the ground. The winner then stomps away in pride, forgiving the enemy. What holds true for the animal world should apply all the more to human relations.

But human society is a complex network of a wide variety of people with angularities and idiosyncrasies. The animals invariably abide by the jungle law; whoever violates it must be punished. Not so, however, with the human species. When one forgives another, the person forgiven may also turn hostile against the forgiver and revile him at an opportune moment. Indeed, human beings sometimes behave in a strangely chimerical manner. Judging by certain behaviour it becomes difficult to define humanity. Why do people behave in such a queer way? We get no plausible answer except that the suppressed impressions come up in that way.

The problem before us is whether or not to forgive. The great power of forgiveness should be showered only on those who *seek* forgiveness, *not as a slave but with the implicit determination*

to change themselves, if forgiven. Those who display a slavish nature and beg pardon for every detected fault are found later to become more crooked by nature. They cut a sorry figure as far as humaneness is concerned. And these are the people who are more dangerous than animals. They will seek every opportunity to overturn the person who forgave them. This class of people comprises even the power-wielders whom Sri Ramakrishna equated with snakes. Warned he, ‘Some people have the nature of a snake: they will bite you without warning. You have to discriminate a great deal in order to avoid the bite; otherwise your passion will be stirred up to such an extent that you will feel like doing injury in return.’⁵ When the question of forgiving such people arises, one has to be wary so as not to take any false step. If forgive we must, we must not forget. We must learn to shield ourselves from the crooked person. The great battle of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata taught us how to remain awake in the midst of battle and even during sleep in the night.

Swamiji said that this world is similar to a gymnasium. We come here to strengthen our soul from the incessant attacks of alien forces. There is a saying that the world can best be enjoyed by the strong. The weak will crumble under so many adverse forces. As we have already seen, only the strong can forgive. Only a strong person knows how much to hit back, because she or he has full control over her or his strength and power. Again, the really strong and brave have a creative bent in them. They know how to make use of the available and reserved resources.

Conclusion

We have just seen that there are people, the weaklings, who flatly ask for pardon when caught red-handed with their harmful intentions. But when relieved of charges, they again attack through


some other loophole in an exceptionally shrewd manner. We should rather not forgive such people. Indian history has been stained by such traitors.

There are, however, another kind of people who may not verbally beg pardon but whose mute gesture and face will tell you in clear terms that they are full of remorse for their wrongs. Not only that, their attitude will speak of their readiness to change. Such people should, of necessity, be forgiven. The Queen of England was once approached for mercy by some convicts on whom the apex court had pronounced a death sentence. Her Majesty pardoned them. The result was, in later years they completely changed themselves so much so that they were put in the posts of the personal bodyguards of Her Majesty!

Great men do forgive others every now and then. They do not dwell on the shortcomings of people. Rather, they make us feel repentant at our misgivings through their purity and strength of character. Those who do not understand such great men through their own intellect are really hapless creatures. Such people only try to torture those great souls, and as a result, heaven's curse descends on them. Jesus Christ was tortured and convicted, and people sentenced him to death for all the good he did to humanity. How did he react to that verdict? That is really important and unparalleled. He prayed, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'⁶ Jesus did not utter these words out of helplessness or any weakness. Rather he spoke out of fullness, out of the bounty of his love.

There is still among us a rare class of people who know only to forgive, who can give love for no return. They are brave enough to go to any length for doing good to others. They are the salt of the earth. The wind carries the fragrance of their character. What little goodness we still find in the world can be ascribed to their contribution. They never hesitate to forgive and help

us notwithstanding our failures and lapses. Bhartrihari has classed them in his hundred verses on ethics as '*Tribhuvanam-upakara-shrenibhih prinayantah*, the three worlds are propitiated by those who do good to others.'⁷ Even amidst excruciating pain in his throat due to cancer and despite the doctor's admonition, Sri Ramakrishna could not be dissuaded from imparting spiritual advice to sincere seekers. He said, 'I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.'⁸ These people never cared for the black spots on other persons. Their unconditional grace flowed spontaneously in a perennial stream. It is such people who can really forgive; others only make a mockery in the name of forgiveness.

Finally, let us summarize certain points. First, in our daily interpersonal dealings, clashes are unavoidable. Still we must forge ahead with our human dignity and emerge victorious. Second, we should not nurture the wounds of hurts by bearing malice against the wrongdoers; for that will degrade us and not the bad persons. Third, we must become sensitive to others' feelings. And finally, let us remember that there are still some good people in the world who tolerate and forgive us; we should neither ignore nor undermine their importance. 

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The Meaning of Brahman Explored

Alan Jacobs

THE GREAT WORLD RELIGION of Hinduism offers a wide variety of choices for its millions of devotees by whose worship they can practise their faith according to their preference and need. Most worshipers choose their favourite god or goddess from the many available in the vast Hindu pantheon. One or the other god or goddess will satisfy every need, often presented pictorially, sculpted, and personified for temple or domestic worship. No sage has ever criticised this widespread practice because they know fully well, that in order to understand and worship God ultimately as the formless One, a practice of such worship is needed. The question then arises as to what is the real meaning of the formless deity? The formless deity is not God in the conventional sense, but rather the principle called Brahman, and never to be confused with the creator god Brahma, who is one amongst the many gods and goddesses available for personal choice.

The Upanishads describe and identify Brahman as the highest supreme Being, the one indivisible eternal universal Self, present in all and in whom all are present. Its name is derived from the word 'brih' meaning to grow, expand, extend, or envelop. As the underlying substratum of the universe it underpins the whole. It is the pinnacle of divine power and plays an incredibly important part in the life of the world and humanity. So what does this word Brahman actually mean?

Sages say that it is 'beyond verbal

description', but as a pointer they postulate Sat-Chit-Ananda which means Reality, Consciousness-Awareness-Bliss. According to Acharya Shankara, Brahman is not a god but the absolute reality. 'That' is the substrate of 'all and everything', which means 'That' contains and permeates the whole of the universe, envelops, and holds it altogether.

Maya, the delusionary power, causes each jiva or soul to superimpose on whatever he or she perceives in their dreamlike life, an apparently real world, appearing on the screen of their consciousness-awareness. But it is really all Brahman, unrecognised as such, because of primal ignorance, which has been caused by the jiva's identification with the egotistic mind and body, and which makes one believe that one is experiencing a real world and is the doer of one's actions.

We can truthfully say that all we see as the seer, the seeing, and the seen is actually Brahman, acting as both the substrate and the power of delusion at the same time. At the point of death we should contemplate on Brahman. This will possibly grant us enlightenment at the end of this life, or else we shall be reborn in a future life into a more auspicious spiritual environment.

A foremost expression of the way to liberation is found in Shankara's famed seminal work entitled *Vivekachudamani* or 'Crest Jewel of Discrimination', a condensation for everyone who is not scholastically trained to read his extensive commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*,

the consolidating text of Advaita Vedanta or non-dualism. The basis and method of this high teaching is devotion, discrimination, and self-enquiry. One soon recognises that the *sad-guru* or supreme teacher is there within each devotee's spiritual heart, indicated temporarily for us by intimations, until we are finally pulled to enter the spiritual heart in its fullness, and then the inner ruler or guru guides one gradually and gracefully to eventual liberation. The final key after absorbing the teaching of the *Vivekachudamani* is to gain the understanding that 'All is Brahman, both inside and outside, and I am That'.

Brahman is the substratum of the 'All'. As Shankara has stated, the dream of life is gracefully preordained by Ishvara or almighty God, an agent of Brahman, for one's spiritual development or evolution. Therefore, all that is perceived on one's screen of conscious awareness is a superimposition on Brahman, followed by the knowledge that 'I am That'. One needs to fully realise that all one perceives inside and out is Brahman and 'I Am That', with great faith, persistence, and determination until the inner guru pulls one fully into the spiritual heart or the Self which is Brahman, and leads to liberation or self-realisation. This method is clearly stated in *Vivekachudamani*, which clearly explains the jiva's dilemma and how to get the final solution of self-realisation from suffering and rebirth in this world.

As the Ribhu Gita fully explores all aspects of Brahman I have selected some important verses to shed authoritative light on this topic. They are taken from chapter twenty-six, which Sri Ramana Maharshi often designated as the heart of the Ribhu Gita. These verses are indications of our true nature, Brahman, and guide us about the essential aspects of a life of contemplation and meditation.

When enquired into deeply, all the multitude of differences will be seen to be never existent. All is the undivided supreme Brahman, which is not different from the Self. And That Am I. By always correctly practising in this exalted certitude and relinquishing all else. Be in the Bliss of being ever That itself (26.3).

That in which there is nothing bad or good. In which there is neither sorrow nor pleasure. In which there is neither silence nor speech, in which there are no pairs of opposites, in which there is no distinction of 'I' or 'body', and in which there is not the least thing to perceive. Ever abide in Bliss, without a trace of concept, in That itself as That itself (26.6).

That in which there is no appearance of illusion, in which there are no effects of delusion, in which there is neither knowledge nor ignorance, in which there is neither Lord nor individual, in which there is neither reality nor unreality, and in which there is not the least appearance of the world. Ever abide in Bliss, without a trace of a concept, in That itself as That itself (26.9).

That in which there is no desire and no anger, in which there is no covetousness and deluded infatuation. In which there is no arrogance and envious malice. In which there are no other impurities of the mind, and in which there is no delusive notion of bondage, and in which there is no delusive notion of liberation. Ever abide in Bliss, without a trace of concept, in That itself as That itself (26.13).

That in which there is no disputation, in which there are no victories or defeats. In which there is no text or its meaning. In which there are no words with which to give expression. In which there is no differentiation of individual and the Supreme, and in which there are no conditionings. Ever abide in Bliss, without a trace of concept, in That itself as That itself (26.17).

That which can be easily attained in an unimpeded manner, by the certitude I Am

Brahman, in which, by quiescence after such certitude, One completely full, ineffable Bliss will reveal itself, and by merger of the mind in which One will be joined with incomparable, unsurpassed contentment. Ever abide in Bliss, without a trace of concept, in That itself as That itself (26.26).

That which is indeed of the nature of undifferentiated Existence, which is indeed of the nature of undifferentiated Consciousness, which is indeed of the nature of undifferentiated Bliss, which is indeed, of the nature of non-duality, which is indeed, not different from the Self, and which is indeed, the undivided supreme Brahman. In the firm certitude that 'I Am That', abide in the Bliss of ever being That itself (29.26).

Casting aside all impure tendencies, by the pristine tendency left by the constant practice of the mantra 'The Absolute Existence Consciousness Bliss Is All and That I ever Am Brahman'. Then subsequently effacing even that tendency. So, son or daughter, you shall soon be fully established in the perfect, full absorption in and as the non-dual supreme Parabrahman itself, and thus attain liberation of being the undifferentiated undivided One (40.26).

Therefore, one can here attain the undifferentiated liberation by abiding as just That itself and with a purified mind arising out of the meditation that whatever is known is Brahman and that am I. Whatever is stated here is the Truth (44.26).

It is the undivided form of our supreme Lord in a state of sublime, joyous dance that says: 'By the conviction that I am ever the Reality, which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and by abiding at one with That, being That itself, the empty bondage of the world can be cut asunder and pure liberation attained (45.26).

We see that the poor suffering jiva or individual has somehow fallen into the world, the sad dream of life, and its repetitive cycle of births and rebirths, out of primal ignorance identifying

itself with the body, mind, and its egotism, which it mistakenly believes to be one's Self. This is a gross error and to be freed from this prison house of life and death, one needs to recover one's real Self, pure Consciousness-Awareness-Bliss, which is Brahman, unfortunately veiled by the subconscious latent tendencies or *vasanas* acquired through many lifetimes.

These *vasanas* can be equated with the repressed subconscious mind and are gradually and gracefully removed through the persistent spiritual practices of devotional surrender to the guru or God in our heart, and investigation into the 'I' thought which constitutes egotism. All this is achieved by the grace of the guru. It may take considerable time as the inner guru must be certain that the devotee is sufficiently attuned to the Consciousness-Awareness. It has up to now been living from *chid-abhasa* or reflected consciousness caused by the *vasanas*.

So we see that the first essential step is to make an inner or outer acquaintance with the great spiritual masters such as Shankara, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramakrishna, or Swami Vivekananda, and others who teach us the high principles of Advaita Vedanta, and the necessary spiritual practices for the removal of the latent tendencies or *vasanas* which occlude the real Self.

The bases of their teachings, as already stated, are devotion, discrimination between the real and unreal, and self-enquiry. The guru then guides one for eventual self-realisation after our intense efforts in self-enquiry and devotional surrender. The final key after fully absorbing the instructions of the *Vivekachudamani* is to reach the conviction that 'All is Brahman' inside and out. Liberation is not to be achieved through endless cycles of time by reading the scriptures or worshipping gods or by anything else than knowledge of the unity

of Brahman and Atman. This is stated poetically in the Ribhu Gita itself, which consistently and persistently beats the drums of the ultimate truth that 'All is Brahman'.


By the conviction that all is Brahman,
The misapprehension that this world and others
exist, will disappear.

Hence, son! Reaching the deep steadfast
awareness

That all is that Brahman and That Am I,
And devoid of any differences,
Be steeped in serenity (27.33).

Brahman is supreme, transcendent, and beyond all dualities. It is this supra-cosmic Divine who supports with its timeless and space-less

existence the entire cosmic manifestation of its own Being in time and space. It is infinite, attributeless, and without name and form.

In conclusion we must accept that in Advaita Vedanta it is not possible to explain Brahman precisely in words. It transcends all attempts at verbal description and ideas. It is therefore without qualities and beyond conceptualisation. It is, however, declared to be the only Truth. Words may never explain exactly what Brahman is or is not, but they can describe its glorious attributes, and is therefore termed with qualities, which are its great powers—Ishvara and Maya. 



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
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Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique

Eds Purushottama Bilimoria
and Dina Al-Kassim

Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, 1 Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001. Website: www.oup.com. 2014. xxiv + 258 pp. ₹ 1,310. ISBN 9780198075561.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asked a question in 1988: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' That question was the expression of a lifetime of observation of the marginalized and witnessing of attempts to civilize the 'aborigine'. Eventually, this question led to *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (CPR) in 1999. A seminal work, this book unsettled and reoriented the thoughts of scholars, brought up new questions and insights, and the very construct of civilization and culture was challenged. In 2000 a group of scholars, of whom many were Gayatri's students—the first name of the celebrated thinker is being used in this review in keeping with her radical spirit—came together as a panel in the annual meeting of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature at Stony Brook University in Long Island, New York, to deliberate on CPR. The panel discussions were engaging and elicited extraordinary response. This encouraged the publication of the proceedings as a special symposium in 2002 in the journal *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. The present book is a result of further working on these proceedings for more than a decade.

This book has become a reality due to the untiring efforts of Purushottama Bilimoria, ably assisted by Dina Al-Kassim, who has also written a wonderful introduction. Bilimoria vividly recounts the unfolding of this book in his preface. Al-Kassim points to the possibility of deliberations

on a specific thinker going on a tangent and immediately assures us that this volume is free from such a defect. The first essay is by Bilimoria who situates Gayatri in relation to Kant and Bimal K Matilal, thinkers whose thoughts she juxtaposes in CPR. Bilimoria stresses that Gayatri's gift is 'a genuine critique of the rational' (1) missed by both Kant and Matilal. Al-Kassim focuses on the transnational scenario, where the 'Native Informant' undermines the very cause the 'civilizing mission' vowed to advocate. The Subaltern is not correctly represented because the 'representative intellectual, in wanting to/attempting to speak for the other, inevitably rebounds into a descriptive representational depiction of that other's speech' (15).

The historiography of a critique is examined by Ritu Birla, who connects the female subjectivity and subalternity to the 'inside and outside' (24) limits of history. She critiques the historical burying of the Rani of Sirmur—who resisted colonial authority—as a mere widow who wanted to become a *sati*. Patriarchal patterns are questioned when Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri, upon failing to do a political assassination, 'hangs herself while menstruating to prevent her political act from being read as the pathology of an unmarried pregnant woman' (35). Derrida's 'lever' and Kantian 'subreption' are read in Gayatri's work by Forest Pyle (39), who tells us of her 'passion of a teaching and a reading of rigour and of rule-breaking that demands of all who encounter it the most rigorous forms of rule-breaking' (40). Of all the hats that Gayatri dons and of all her faces that emerge from this volume that of a teacher is the strongest in character. Thomas Keenan analyses this statement of Gayatri: 'The push and pull of rights and responsibilities unevenly agonize the field of *différance* between capitalism and socialism' (51). Mark Sanders postulates the 'reading-other-wise as response to the call of the wholly other' (63) as another formulation of 'the permanent parabasis of *darstellen* and *vertreten*' (ibid.).

Drucilla Cornell talks about the 'art of witnessing' and that women's 'journey can be understood as an allegory for how difficult it is not only for historical voices that have been suppressed but also for new voices to find the means of representation to be seen and heard' (90). Mieke Bal delineates the necessity of reading CSR though it is difficult to read, thus compelling reading other-wise. Multiple levels of reading, academic or otherwise, prompts Bal to posit a 'Three-way Misreading' of CSR, where she refuses to 'follow the author's "intention"' (105). She presents 'readings in ... archival-ardor mode ... as evidence of the referential will of deconstructionist reading' (119). However, it is the 'teacher-image' that lingers "'imaged" in much the same way that' Gayatri 'unpacks other-determination' (128) because the 'classroom is' her 'site of passion' (120).

Stephen Morton tries to position CSR from the perspective of the Kantian critique and attempts to find reason in 'postcolonial reason'. He discovers the 'clandestine inclusion of woman as a masculine figure in the dominant political philosophy of democracy' (158). Maria Koundoura revisits rights and 'Kantian vision's contemporary life' (170) in the process of becoming a citizen as opposed to the othering of the Aborigines of Australia. Chetan Bhatt interprets Gayatri's ethics as 'the interpretation of narrative as ethical instantiation' (199) and is critical that 'in allowing Kant's privileging of *philosophical* time' Gayatri's 'critique can be seen to do the same' (195). Adrian Parr insists that we 'consider the success or failure of politics in terms of affectivity' as Gayatri and Deleuze 'invite us to do' (203). He reminds us that 'as we encounter expressions of freedom we are all presented with the terrifying prospect that subjectivity, including our own, can be disposed of once *potestas* is strengthened through the exploitation of our *potentia*' (219).

The best part of this book is the section with Gayatri's responses to the panel, which include the replies she gave during the conference, and the additions she wrote leisurely, eight years later. She begins with an expression of being overwhelmed at the series of papers and a fond remembrance of tutoring her student Forest Pyle or Tres. This is followed by a clarification: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Dina Al-Kassim 'are not *for* women's faces

being burnt up by acid' but 'are with the movements that have been in place for decades now' (225). Neither does Gayatri consider '*sati* empowering' but holds only that 'the criminalization of *sati* was an unquestioned good' (ibid.). She has complaint only against the 'impatience of human rights' (226) and remembers her roots when she remarks that 'Bimal was perhaps the only person in the world who could work with the established tradition of rational critique within Indian philosophy' (ibid.).

Responding to the papers individually, Gayatri finds that 'Kant needed to foreclose the tribal to philosophize, that Hegel had a foregone conclusion' (233). Gently chiding Bilimoria that 'he might have ventured forth into the wide outside' (234), Gayatri concurs with Dina Al-Kassim for sensing that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (234). Gayatri then confesses that she 'will have to think ... for a long time' about 'history or historiography as the secret encounter' (235) as posited by Ritu Birla. Gayatri's comments are not without candour. She is incisive and finds the review of Chetan Bhatt with 'problems'. Apart from many misleading statements Bhatt's paper has totally missed possibilities such as that of reterritorializing 'the project of a just and secular world' (243). His paper also suffers from contradictions like though he says that Gayatri reads Kant wrongly, in a footnote he affirms that she is interesting, leading her to wonder whether at all he is serious. Gayatri is convinced that 'any readerly connection between the raw man ... and the inadvertent example of the West Australian and Fuegian is not thereby annulled' (245) and is left with 'embarrassment' after reading Bhatt.

Diligently edited, elegantly printed, this handy volume is an interesting and thought-provoking read for anyone even remotely interested in the humanities. On the cover is the painting 'Spivak with Bear', which is part of a series named 'Exit, Pursued by a Bear'—featuring leading thinkers—by Gordon Lester. As Bilimoria points out in the preface, this 'volume is also an offering to celebrate her being made a laureate of the Kyoto Prize in Art and Philosophy in late 2012' (x). In sum, this work is a fitting tribute to one of the most brilliant minds of our time.

PB

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bhubaneswar:** Dr S C Jamir, Governor of Odisha, inaugurated the seminar on education on 19 October 2014 which was attended by 400 teachers, professors, and others. **Cherrapunji:** 103 youth counselling programmes in 7 states in the north-east from 3 August to 28 September which were attended by 1,128 youths. **Rahara:** A students' convention on 11 September in which 898 students participated. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** Two public meetings at the centre on 10 and 16 October which were attended by 1,400 people. On the centre's initiative, two public meetings were held at two places in Kolkata on 22 and 30 September. In all, about 650 people attended the programmes.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja was celebrated at Belur Math from 1 to 4 October with due solemnity and joy. About two lakh devotees attended the Puja to receive the blessings of the Divine Mother. The Kumari Puja performed on 2 October drew huge crowds, and the Sandhi Puja on that day was also attended by many devotees. The Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, Smt J Manjula Chellur, attended the Puja on the Ashtami day. Doordarshan Kolkata telecast live the Puja on all the days. The Kumari Puja was telecast by several private channels also, and the entire celebration was streamed live on Belur Math website. Cooked Prasad was served to about 49,000 devotees on Ashtami day and to about one lakh devotees during the four days.



Inauguration of kitchen-cum-reception block at Mayavati

Durga Puja, in image, was celebrated at the following 24 centres: Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar (under Agartala), Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella (under Cherrapunji), Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama.

News of Branch Centres

The lower primary school building of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji** at Maraikaphon was declared open on 27 September. Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new kitchen-cum-reception block at **Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati** on 22 October. Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the renovated Dilaram Bungalow, sanctified by Swamiji's

Hudhud Cyclone Relief by Visakhapatnam centre



stay, at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara** on 28 October. A student of **Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara** has secured first rank in the B.Ed. Examination 2014 conducted by West Bengal State University.

Relief

Hudhud Cyclone Relief • **Andhra Pradesh:**


The devastating cyclone Hudhud which struck a major portion of the coastal Andhra Pradesh in the month of October left widespread destruction in its wake. Visakhapatnam centre conducted primary relief work in the affected areas as per the following details: (i) Supply of nearly 94,000 l of drinking water to Uppada, Bimli, Jalari Peta, Relli Veedhi, Vasavani Palem, Pedda Waltair, and Satgal Nagar localities of Visakhapatnam city among 380 families from 16 to 19 October, (ii) 1,500 kg rice, 300 kg onions, 240 kg edible oil, 300 packets of rusks, 150 kg detergent powder, and toiletries distributed among 300 families in Pudimadaka village near Visakhapatnam on 16 October, (iii) 1,500 kg rice, 300 kg lentils, 300 kg flour, 150 kg sugar, 300 l of edible oil, 600 packets of biscuits, 300 bed covers, and 20,000 l of drinking water distributed among 300 families in Gangavaram village near Visakhapatnam on 19 October, (iv) 3,710 kg rice, 530 kg lentils, 265 kg sugar, 265 kg salt, 530 l of edible oil, 1,060 packets of biscuits, 530 bars of washing soap, 530 matchboxes, and 530 bed covers distributed in 16 villages in Madugula Mandal area of Visakhapatnam district among 530 families on 22 October.

Flood Relief • **Assam:** From 27 to 29 September **Cherrapunji** centre distributed 770 kg milk powder, 1,500 packets of biscuits, 558 polythene sheets, 1,500 buckets, 1,500 packets of mosquito-repellent coils, 3,000 matchboxes, and 7,200 candles among 1,500 families of 18 villages in Balijana and Agia blocks of Goalpara district in Assam affected by severe floods. **Jammu & Kashmir:** **Jammu** centre continued its relief work among the victims of flash floods and landslides in the state. The centre distributed 3,000 corrugated sheets, 850 bags of cement, 260 iron pipes—20 feet each—and 85 blankets among 150 families

of 74 villages in Rajouri, Reasi, and Udhampur districts on 28 September and 6 October. The centre also distributed 540 blankets and an equal number of shawls and jackets among 540 families in Poonch and Rajouri districts on 17 and 18 October. In spite of its own precarious condition following the floods, **Srinagar** centre conducted relief work in its adjoining areas. The centre distributed 10 kg rice, 2 kg lentils, 1 kg tea powder, 2 kg salt, 4 l of edible oil, 4 kg assorted spices, 3 utensil-sets, toiletries, and assorted clothing among eight neighbouring poor families and provided medical care to 291 flood-affected patients.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: **India: Cherrapunji:** 410 saris and 657 sets of garments from 30 September to 12 October. **Gadadhar Ashrama (Kolkata):** 105 saris on 29 September. **Garbeta:** 275 saris, 215 dhotis, 320 sets of children's garments, 25 lungis, 35 vests, 20 shirts, and 20 pants from 23 to 30 September. **Jalpaiguri:** 400 saris on 23 September and 200 mosquito-nets on 26 October. **Malliankaranai:** School uniforms, pens, pencils, erasers, and scales among 293 students on 9 October. **Manasadwip:** 600 saris and 100 dhotis in the month of September. **Naora:** 900 saris, 200 dhotis, 800 children's garments, and 89 solar lanterns in the month of September. **Silchar:** 2,295 saris, 1,328 dhotis, and 500 chaddars in the month of September. **Bangladesh: Dhaka:** Saris, dhotis, and lungis to 650 families in the month of October. **Dinajpur:** 991 saris, 513 dhotis, and 32 chaddars in the month of October. **Jessore:** 200 dhotis and 50 saris on 29 September.

Winter Relief • The various items were distributed to poor people through the following centres: **Cherrapunji:** 500 blankets and 380 shawls from 30 September to 12 October, **Jamtara:** 250 blankets on 25 and 26 September, **Khetri:** 50 blankets on 26 October and 242 sweaters on 29 September, **Ranchi Morabadi:** 400 blankets from 28 to 31 August.

Rehabilitation • **West Bengal: Naora** centre built a shed and 11 low-cost toilets and sunk a tube well at Bhangar-I and Canning-II blocks in South 24 Parganas district and handed over 2 cycle rickshaws to needy people. 



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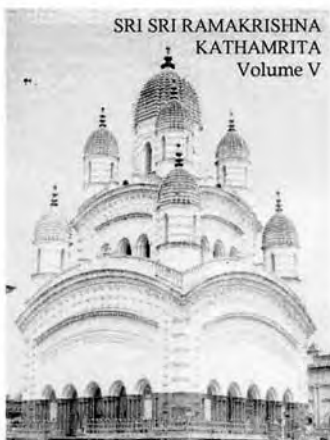
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